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**Practitioner Research on Task Motivation  
in a Chinese University Context:  
Integrating Macro and Micro Perspectives**

by

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the  
degree of Doctor of Philosophy in  
English Language Teaching and Applied Linguistics

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# Declaration

I, Na Li, am the sole author of this research thesis submitted in completion of the Ph.D. in English Language Teaching Research at the Centre for English Language Teacher Education (CELTE), University of Warwick. This thesis represents my own work, except where due acknowledgement is made. It has not been previously included in a thesis, dissertation or report submitted to this University or to any other institution for a degree, diploma or other qualifications.

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Na Li (李娜)



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## Abstract

This qualitative research on task motivation is based on a four-month fieldwork in a university context in China, with myself performing dual roles as a teacher researcher working closely with two classes of final-year English majors (about 120 students in total). Positioning this research in an authentic classroom setting aims to explore task-intrinsic features perceived to be motivating ('motivating tasks'), and learner-intrinsic motivational processes during task engagement ('task motivation') in this particular context.

Throughout the process, my research perspectives experienced an interesting movement: macro → micro → macro. I began my research with a broad interest in the motivation area, and increasingly narrowed my focus on 'task motivation' which corresponds to the recently advocated 'situation-specific' approach to motivation research. However, my following involvement in the teaching/data-gathering fieldwork pushed me to bring back the macro perspective into my research, as I found that the complex concept of task motivation could not be fully understood without taking the broader motivational influences into consideration. That is, apart from investigating how the immediate task situation influences learners, it is also very important to understand how the wider institutional, social, educational, and cultural factors influence learners' various motivational perspectives in the classroom, which may in turn shape their specific task-engagement motivation.

Based on content analysis of qualitative data including written task feedback, personal letters, and group interviews, it was found that in this context there are three underlying dimensions of task motivation, that is, academic motivation, personal development motivation, and affective motivation. The study also explored what aspects of task design could effectively motivate students and why. In general, this research contributes to our understanding of Chinese university students' task motivation. It implies that adapted tasks can be appropriately integrated into the traditional English class in China and perhaps in other similar EFL contexts, and can certainly facilitate the teaching of the prescribed textbooks. It also implies that the researcher's personal involvement in the authentic teaching context is a very valuable point for both motivation research and task-oriented research.

# **Chapter 1 Introduction**

## **1.0 Introduction**

This very first chapter provides background information to the research. It starts with my motivation for the study, which arises from my particular research interest and previous English learning/teaching experience. It then continues with a brief introduction to the theoretical background of this study, which mainly covers two research areas—‘tasks’ and ‘motivation’. My proposed research framework and research questions are included in this section as well. The third section describes the institutional context. The chapter ends with an overview of the thesis.

## **1.1 My motivation for the study**

My motivation for this research stems from my personal experience of learning English both at home (People’s Republic of China) and abroad (United Kingdom), coupled with my limited but valuable teaching experience.

### **1.1.1 Why this research interest**

My research interest initially came from the experience of doing a Master’s course in the field of ELT in the UK. The module of ‘Psychology of Language Learning and Teaching’ seemed particularly interesting to me, as it revealed the underlying reasons behind all kinds of learning behaviours that I had come across before. The concept of ‘Motivation’, then, became an attractive topic which greatly motivated me to explore

‘what it is, how it works, and why it works in this way or that’.

While studying ‘motivation’, I gradually increased my knowledge of the history of its development during the past decades, the change in approaches from macro to micro perspective, and the expansion of its research methodology from purely quantitative to the inclusion of qualitative methods. In connection with the previous research work in this area and the reflection on my own teaching/learning situation in China, I found my greatest interest was in the *classroom*, as it is the major place where language education takes place. Considering my future teaching career, I was very interested to explore what is going on in the language classroom, why it happens in certain ways, and how to improve things that should and could be improved.

Within the classroom context, I wanted to pay more attention to *students* in this study. It would be interesting to hear students’ voices and find out how various motivational factors within and beyond classrooms might influence their immediate learning behaviours, and how these factors might be influenced by their broader life circumstances and goals. In this regard, I would hope for my research participants’ active participation in the learning process, because it would be hard for them to make critical comments if they had little knowledge of what was going on in class. I would also expect to have sufficient communication with them in various ways, in



order to elicit their opinions more effectively and comprehensively.

What is the best way of getting students actively involved in classroom learning? To this question, '*language learning tasks*' was the first answer turning up in my mind, firstly because they have in principle the potential of engaging students; and secondly because my personal learning experience in the UK has made me aware of the possibility of enhancing classroom participation through tasks in practice. I was impressed by the British teaching style and the learning atmosphere in the classroom where most students would take an active part in a variety of tasks and at the same time benefit from each other in an interactive way. Reflecting on my past schooling history in China which was mostly full of tough and tiring rote study, it was clear to see the great need for teachers to create more opportunities for participation, and to motivate students to make good use of them.

With an eager intention to promote classroom interaction by integrating 'tasks' into English teaching, I was also aware of the prime importance for teachers to understand their students and the actual teaching/learning situation. After all, the effect of using tasks may vary from class to class, depending on a number of factors. For the teacher's part, her way of giving instruction, her personality, her ability in managing the classroom, etc. could all affect task effectiveness. For the students' part, their attitudes, language proficiency, learning beliefs, aims, preferences, interests and

confidence, could be even more important than the task itself. In addition, the overall classroom atmosphere, the class size, the learning culture, and the teacher-student relationship, should not be neglected either.

Regarding the research that I intended to carry out, there are two additional points to emphasise: firstly, my particular interest was in students' psychological and emotional responses to tasks rather than their linguistic outcomes or products. Secondly, to complement previous task research mostly conducted under laboratory conditions, my study was an attempt to explore the authentic contextual and social factors which might affect students' motivation for tasks. Thus, I wanted to design a series of tasks for the participants and then investigate, by inviting their feedback and comments, the reasons behind their perceptions of why some task features were more motivating whereas others were less so. Based on their opinions in this regard, meanwhile, I was also interested to find out the favourable conditions or unfavourable constraints which might facilitate or inhibit task implementation in that context. Eventually, I should be able to draw inferences about what kinds of motives may get students well engaged in tasks, and how these underlying motives are influenced by the factors inside and outside classrooms. I believe such implications would be of great help to English teachers in other similar EFL contexts in suggesting some way of bringing appropriate tasks into their language classrooms.

### **1.1.2 Why a university context**

I chose to focus on a university context for several reasons. Firstly, the university culture seems more likely to allow difference and welcome innovation, whereas the majority of lower-level middle schools tend to stick to traditional and conservative teaching methods in the face of the huge pressure of high-stakes examinations. Secondly, the language classroom at university level in China is in great need of importation and adaptation of some teaching methods, in order to create more opportunities for highly-authentic communication in either written or spoken forms. Such needs seem more urgent for university students as they are at a special developmental stage, and will soon enter the real society in which some of them need to use English in a more practical way (e.g. using English as a working language in some companies).

In addition, my research aim of exploring task motivation would be better met with university-level students as they should be more sophisticated in the way of seeing what happens and changes around them, and therefore should be more capable of expressing their opinions in a critical manner. Another pedagogical aim embodied in this research is to raise students' awareness of their own learning process by inviting more initiatives and responsibilities from them, which is fairly important for university students to distinguish themselves from younger school students who are still rather dependent on their teachers.



Apart from the ‘inherent’ features of the university context itself, my personal teaching experience with university students was another motivating factor. In the process of teaching, the biggest problem I confronted was classroom participation. As a novice teacher lacking professional knowledge several years ago, I simply set up an aim for myself, that is, to attract my students’ attention as much as possible by getting them engaged in various activities. Based on the later knowledge that I have gained in recent years in the UK, I realised the so-called ‘classroom activity’ (as it is known by Chinese teachers and students in my previous learning/teaching context) that I relied on was quite close to the concept of ‘task’, and accordingly my initial teaching aim could be interpreted as ‘keeping students motivated in learning English in class by means of tasks’. With this awareness, I reflected on my teaching and was interested to find out the theoretical explanation underlying the visible classroom phenomenon. Put specifically, I was wondering why some of my classroom activities worked well but others did not; why similar activities worked better on some occasions than others; why the same activity attracted some students but unfortunately lost others; how students really benefited from various activities; what they actually expected to learn from the class and from activities; what kinds of activities could be perceived as motivating by most students; how the activities met students’ short-term and long-term learning needs and goals; how students’ general English learning motivation affected their attitudes towards the activities; whether there was any other non-English-learning-motivation which might influence their learning behaviours. All these questions prompted me to carry out the present

research. In addition, what I really hoped to achieve was not only the understanding of my past teaching experience, but more importantly the insights which could inform my future teaching and offer some useful suggestions for other language teachers in similar EFL contexts.

To sum up, my research interests in ‘task’ and ‘motivation’ areas arose from my personal learning experience in the UK as well as a degree of ‘educational shock’ that I experienced, which made me more aware of what is needed in order to improve the quality of English education in the university contexts in China. My reflection on previous teaching also made me curious to understand the above questions and find out ways of improving my practice. Therefore, I started this research aiming to explore university students’ task motivation and the motivating features of tasks appropriate for the Chinese context.

## **1.2 Theoretical background of the study**

In this section, I will briefly introduce the overall theoretical background of the present study. The relevant and detailed literature review will be presented in the following chapters. As can be seen, this study mainly involves two research areas—*Tasks* and *Motivation*—which are initially fairly independent of each other in Second/Foreign Language Acquisition (SLA), but have now become more and more closely related.



### **1.2.1 L2 motivation research**

Following the pioneering work of Gardner and Lambert (1959), there has appeared a substantial amount of studies on language learning motivation in the past decades, as motivation is generally regarded as a key factor in second/foreign language learning. Undoubtedly, no motivation research can avoid the influence of Gardner's theory which was grounded in social psychology and had dominated this field for quite a few years until the 1990s (Gardner and Lambert, 1972; Gardner, 1985). Small wonder, then, that Gardner's approach, as a foundation in a sense, has made a great contribution in that it 'allowed researchers to characterise and compare the motivational pattern of whole learning communities' (Dörnyei, 2003: 11). It was appropriate at the time when it was comparatively easy to define what was meant by second or foreign language learning community. However, the increasing 'powerful forces of globalisation' have made it harder to explain the ever-complex motivation construct, as social groups associated with particular languages become less identifiable (Lamb, 2004: 3).

In the early 1990s, the 'motivational renaissance' (Gardner and Tremblay, 1994) took place, with the key assumption that 'the classroom environment—and, more generally, the contextual surroundings of action—had a much stronger motivational influence than had been proposed before' (Dörnyei, 2003: 11). In this regard, several cognitive-situated motivation theories emerged as the times required. On the one

hand, ‘motivational psychologists representing a cognitive perspective argued convincingly that how one thinks about one’s abilities, possibilities, potentials, limitations, past performance, as well as various aspects of the tasks to achieve or goals to attain (e.g., values, benefits, difficulties) is a crucial aspect of motivation’ (Dörnyei, 2005: 74). Two of the influential research areas in this regard are self-determination theory (Deci and Ryan, 1985, 2002) and attribution theory (Weiner, 1992).

On the other hand, a growing amount of research has attempted to examine various contextual factors and carried out a more ‘situated analysis of motivation as it operates in actual learning situations’ (Dörnyei, 2005: 74). A typical example is Dörnyei’s (1994) three-level motivational framework which discusses motivation respectively at the language level, the learner level, and the learning situation level. Another fruitful research direction in this vein, which has been seen as the ‘culmination of the situated approach’ (Dörnyei, 2003: 14), is ‘task motivation’ (Julkunen, 1989, 2001; Dörnyei, 2002; Dörnyei and Kormos, 2000, etc.) As Dörnyei (2003) says, ‘tasks constitute the basic building block of classroom learning, and accordingly, L2 motivation can hardly be examined in a more situated manner than within a task-based framework’ (2003: 14). In addition to the research orientation, being aware of learners’ task motivation may have significant pedagogic implications as well. For classroom teachers, understanding students’ particular motivation for tasks may not only be of great help for successful task design, but also allow teachers

to recognise students' learning motivation in general.

In the late 1990s, the cognitive-situated approach brought along a new period—the process-oriented period, resulting in a ‘process model’ (Dörnyei and Ottó, 1998: Dörnyei, 2003) which focuses on a ‘rather neglected aspect of motivation: its dynamic character and temporal variation’ (Dörnyei, 2003: 17). Compared with previous research paradigms, this model is particularly useful in explaining the ongoing changes of motivation over time, in view of the fact that learner motivation is not likely to always remain stable during the learning process, no matter long or short.

In short, the evolution of motivation research has seen a salient change from a ‘macro’ to a ‘micro’ perspective (Dörnyei, 2003, 2005). Meanwhile, the research methodology in this domain has experienced some changes as well. A typical example is the adoption of qualitative approaches (e.g. Ushioda, 2001), which has been seen as a good complement to the dominant quantitative one. A qualitative study can perhaps better describe the complex motivation picture which in many cases may not be able to be fully explained by the figures and tables only.

### **1.2.2 Task-based research**

Tasks, as an important construct, have received a substantial amount of attention from both SLA researchers and language teachers, although they may be viewed



differently from the perspective of research and that of pedagogy. Ellis (2000) once succinctly and clearly stated that, ‘researchers, for example, may view a task in terms of a set of variables that impact on performance and language acquisition whereas teachers see it as a unit of work in an overall scheme of work’ (2000: 194).

Regarding the research oriented approaches to tasks, there are mainly two different approaches within the SLA field. Firstly, from a *psycholinguistic* perspective, the task per se is the primary concern of researchers. They look closely into the *task features* (which are also similarly named ‘task characteristics’, ‘task variables’, ‘task properties’, or ‘task dimensions’) as well as the relationship between task features and learners’ task performance and/or language acquisition. Here are some examples which represent some different theoretical positions in this vein (a more detailed summary can be found in Ellis, 2000; and in Skehan, 1998): 1) Studies based on Long’s (1983, 1996) Interaction Hypothesis have explored the relationship between task dimensions and the quality of meaning negotiation promoted. 2) A cognitive approach developed by Skehan (1998) has supported empirical investigations on the relationship between task variables (i.e. task features and task implementation) and the quality of learners’ productions in terms of fluency, accuracy and complexity. 3) Yule’s (1997) research has examined the relationship between task-processes (e.g. task design and task implementation) and the communicative outcomes. In general, the investigations in this tradition may have sufficient explanatory power in answering the question—what are learners supposed to do and acquire (in principle)

while engaging in the task?

Secondly, the research from a *socio-cultural* perspective is mainly focused on the *task participants*, that is, learners and/or teachers. Some studies (e.g. Coughlan and Duff, 1994; Brooks and Donato, 1994) have examined how learners' interpretations and orientation could affect their ways of performing tasks. Other studies (e.g. Swain and Lapkin, 1998; Samuda, 2001) have seen the positive effects of scaffolding on learners' language acquisition. Therefore, the contributions derived from this research perspective may be well used in answering another question—what do learners actually do and acquire (in effect) during the engagement in the task?

Within these twin perspectives, task-based research does have certain common features. First, the majority of such research has been conducted under fairly controlled laboratory conditions rather than within intact classes in an actual situation. Second, it is usually the end-of-task productions and/or the on-task interaction between learners that are seen as research criteria for measuring task effectiveness. However, the participants' voices and feelings regarding their task-engagement experience are rarely heard. The third salient feature is that task research is 'generally of a quantitative nature, although increasingly with qualitative research components' (Skehan, 2003: 9). In addition, most researchers tend to implement tasks and collect data simply as an 'outsider' but not a real teacher, with the brief intervention

involving only a few hours within a few weeks.

Therefore, some of the important and informative findings drawn from the task-based research under the above-mentioned conditions might still remain at the theoretical level. It seems crucial that the existing valuable task theories should be effectively brought to language teachers in various educational contexts. In the meantime, more longitudinal research which could reflect conventional extended pedagogic involvement should be encouraged as well (Skehan, 2003). In this regard, it is also important to bear in mind that all kinds of unexpected factors might turn up when conducting research in an authentic situation, which is what a teacher researcher cannot avoid and should endeavour to manage.

### **1.2.3 My research framework and research questions**

Being interested in the above two research areas, I designed a framework which hopefully formed a helpful connection between them. Using the key initials, I named it ‘3E Framework’ as it consists of three components—‘Expectation’, ‘Experience’, and ‘Evaluation’. (Details of this framework will be given later in Chapter 4.) This framework mainly worked as a methodological foundation and a pedagogical plan. From a methodological point of view, it served as an underlying building structure of the construction work; that is to say, it informed my research design and data-gathering process that passed through three phases (Expectation – Experience – Evaluation) over a teaching term. Regarding its pedagogical function, the 3E



framework aimed to set up a classroom-friendly work plan and develop a set of practical suggestions for teachers, particularly in EFL contexts, on how to design tasks that contribute to both student motivation and learning, especially among adult learners.

Building on the 3E framework, I intended to conduct this empirical study with two **purposes**: 1) to explore *task-intrinsic* features perceived to be motivating; and 2) to investigate *learner-intrinsic* motivational processes during task engagement. After finding out students' 'task motivation' and their favoured 'motivating tasks', I was hoping to shed some light on how to design tasks which may activate students' existing or potential motivations on the one hand, and serve the language education purposes on the other. In addition, I also hoped to increase my understanding of the complexity of classroom life through this qualitative/descriptive study, which would certainly be helpful for exploring students' motivation to learn English and possibly beyond.

In the light of these research purposes, I specified my research questions as follows:

1. What aspects of task design are perceived to be motivating features by English majors in this Chinese university?
2. What are the underlying sources of English majors' task motivation in this context?

3. In what ways do the immediate and broader contexts influence students' various motivational perspectives in the classroom, which might in turn shape their task-engagement motivation?

In order to answer these questions, I planned to involve myself in an actual teaching process and to observe my participants' various learning behaviors in certain ways. More importantly, I wanted to guide them to reflect consciously at some points of the teaching/data-gathering process, aiming to explore the 'deep' reasons behind their behaviors, by listening to their voices on all issues coming up during the learning process. I believed my personal involvement as a teacher researcher in this empirical study would certainly contribute to the motivation research field and to SLA in general. As Dörnyei (2003) says, 'relating various motivational characteristics to actual learning processes makes it possible to link L2 motivation research more closely to a range of SLA issues' (2003: 23).

### **1.3 Institutional context of the study**

In this opening chapter, it is necessary to provide readers with detailed information of the context where this research was conducted, as contextual and situational factors could play a crucial role in any research, especially in the social field. This contextual aspect is becoming more and more important for motivation researchers as well, particularly those who adopt a situated approach. Inspired by McGroarty's (2001) thought-provoking paper on the links between individual and social



influences on learning, Dörnyei (2003) further stated that ‘this contextualisation of L2 motivation did not happen in isolation but coincided with a parallel situated shift in psychology that highlighted the role of the social context in any learning activity’ (2003: 12).

In the present study, the specific context where I conducted my teaching and collected data is Shengda Economics, Trade and Management College (for short, Shengda College or Shengda University), which is a Non-state/private college officially affiliated to Zhengzhou University (which is a public one). It operates very independently in all aspects including finance, administration, management, teacher resources, student recruitment, examination and assessment. Shengda University only runs undergraduate courses and awards Bachelor’s degrees. The tuition fees are relatively higher than that of public universities, because there is no financial support from the local or national government for private universities. In the following sections, I am going to give some detailed information about relevant contextual factors—the teachers, the students, the course, and the tasks.

### **1.3.1 The teacher**

The academic staff of Shengda University mainly come from three sources. Firstly, a small number of teachers are selected from excellent graduates from this university or very rarely other universities, to work as full-time staff. They are generally young, with little or no teaching experience. Secondly, a large number of teachers are invited

from other local universities or colleges. Although they hold permanent positions at these other institutions, they also work in Shengda as part-time teachers. The third small group of teachers are retired staff from other local institutions, who may choose to be employed in Shengda either full-time or part-time as they like.

It is here important to talk about the difference between full-time and part-time teachers as well as their respective advantages and disadvantages. There is no need to talk much about the different ways of getting paid as this has little to do with the research. However, the teachers' different ways of working and the implicit teaching attitudes are worth noting. Normally the full-time teachers are required to stay in their offices or campus rooms (except during teaching hours when they are in the classrooms) during the day, and are therefore in a sense more accessible to students when needed. However, part-time teachers are sent to and back from the campus by school bus every day, partly because they are not offered offices in this university and partly because they still have their own jobs somewhere else. In other words, most of the part-time teachers arrive at the classrooms 10 minutes before class and then leave immediately after class. In this case, the most discouraging problem is the lack of chances for teacher-student communication, which has been seen as kind of hindrance to mutual understanding and healthy development of rapport.

Another unfavourable aspect is the instability of teacher resources, especially of

part-time teachers. Usually Shengda University only signs short-term contracts (i.e. one academic term) with part-time staff, which may result in the frequent changes of teachers. For different modules, this might not be a problem. But for some continuous modules, most students prefer to have the same teacher teaching for a longer period. Otherwise they will have to adjust to different teaching styles too often.

As regards teacher attitudes, it seems unfair to draw any conclusion that full-time teachers are better than part-time teachers or vice versa. There are both excellent and somewhat unsatisfactory teachers in each group. However, I did find a shocking phenomenon that many students often spoke highly of the less experienced young teachers for their responsibility and enthusiasm, but on the contrary expressed their criticism of some experienced part-time teachers. Certain students have the impression that part-time teachers just work for money because working in private universities can be very profitable. One extreme case I have heard of is that a class of students even successively requested to change three part-time teachers (for the same module) within a term, because they were dissatisfied with their teaching quality and attitudes.

### **1.3.2 The student**

Just like the students enrolled in other regular higher education institutions, all the students studying in Shengda University have taken part in the National College



Entrance Examination. According to the different entrance requirements, students' scores might be comparatively lower than those of students who have successfully got offers from more prestigious universities. This general trend could say something about students' competence but does not necessarily mean that students of this university are at lower levels in every aspect. After all, a one-off examination is not the only criterion by which we judge students' comprehensive abilities.

English is a compulsory test among the overall college entrance examinations. In addition, it is a compulsory module for all university students, no matter what course they are doing. For non-English majors, the English module usually runs for two academic years; and then they are required to take the College English Test—Band 4 (for short, CET-4) which determines whether they could get a Bachelor's degree eventually. For English majors, a variety of English modules run for four years. At specified stages, they are encouraged to take the Test for English Majors—Band 4 or 8 (for short, TEM-4 or TEM-8), which is voluntary in some universities (including Shengda) but might be compulsory in others. In view of the importance of TEM-4 and TEM-8, most English majors would like to have a try, because they believe it will be an advantage in the future job market.

In view of the relevance of the present research, here I will give a few figures to show the English proficiency level of English majors of Shengda university, in

comparison with those of other universities.

Test for English Majors—Band 8 (TEM-8)		
Year	Average ‘passing rate’ <sup>1</sup> of Shengda students (English majors)	National average ‘passing rate’ (English majors)
2003	56.46%	51.35%
2004	67.09%	56.74%
2005	64.79%	54.17%

Table 1-1: Passing rate of TEM-8.

(Cited from <http://www2.shengda.edu.cn/wyx/hortation.htm>, 27 Sep. 05)

Seeing the above figures, the reader may have an impression that only a small percentage of students pass this test. This result is not surprising; firstly because this test is indeed difficult, and secondly because the number of universities in China is huge. Actually in the small number of first-class universities, the average passing rate can be as high as around 90%. But it drops sharply when taking all the universities into account. In general, the above information indicates that students of Shengda University stand near the average in English proficiency level, and therefore should be able to well represent the larger population of Chinese university students.

The final point I would like to make here is the particularity of English majors. According to the criteria for recruiting new students in Shengda University, those who are accepted by the Foreign Languages Department might generally have a relatively higher score in English among all the entrance exams. In addition, it is

<sup>1</sup> Note: ‘Passing rate’ here refers to the percentage of test takers who passed.

supposed to be the case that most of the English majors are either willing to learn English to a more advanced level, or expecting to relate their future careers to this important international language. However, there is a certain percentage of students in each class who are allocated to study in this department because their total scores are not high enough to let them choose their favourite majors. That is to say, some students are doing a course that is not their first preference. Therefore, it could be anticipated that my future research participants would have different levels of language proficiency, different attitudes towards English, and different motivations to learn it even though they are all called 'English majors'. The only thing they have in common is that they are all 'treated' as 'English majors'—attending the same lectures, using the same textbooks (which are different from what the non-English majors use), and being assessed in the same way for getting the degree.

### 1.3.3 The course

English majors at Shengda University are required to take some fundamental modules during the first couple of years and more advanced/specialised modules during the last two years. Among all the modules, *Intensive English Reading* (also known as 'Advanced English Reading' or 'Comprehensive English' in this context) has always been the core one. The prescribed textbooks for this course are a set of domestically designed books called 'A New English Course', from Level 1 to Level 8, which are supposed to be used continuously from the first year to the final year, with each year (comprising two terms) covering two levels. The first four books (i.e.



from Level 1 to Level 4) aim at the training in basic and comprehensive language skills, while the rest of them (i.e. from Level 5 to Level 8) focus more on intensive reading skills for advanced learners. In each book, there are more than ten units, with each unit containing two texts (i.e. TEXT I and TEXT II) selected from contemporary anthologies and modern English classics on various subjects and in different writing styles. TEXT I texts are intended to be studied more intensively compared with TEXT II texts which are meant to supplement TEXT I in content as well as in language. (In Shengda University, Level 8 is usually left untaught due to time limits.) During my fieldwork, I taught this course with the ‘Level 7’ textbook, and my students were in the first term of their final year. As a core module, it was allocated 6 hours per week, with a two-hour session on every other day.

### **1.3.4 The task**

‘Task’ is an important concept in this research. The theoretical review as well as the methodological design of tasks will be discussed in the following chapter. At this point, however, it is necessary to talk about my potential participants’ perception of this term, as I have been aware that this theoretical concept might embody different interpretations in different contexts and its implementation should be adjusted according to the actual situation.

Reflecting on my own English learning experience in classroom contexts in China, I have an impression that not many Chinese students have an appropriate

understanding of ‘tasks’ in accordance with the definition and criteria suggested in the western literature. As a learner, to be frank, I myself had never come across this term within the field of language learning. Similarly, as a teacher, I had never seriously studied this concept or explicitly introduced it to my students.

In order to test my assumption, I asked a couple of questions (i.e., ‘When I first mentioned the concept of ‘task’ to you, what was your first impression? What did you think it was like?’ see Question 1, Table 6-2) in the final-stage group interviews. The questions were asked in Chinese, with only the word ‘task’ in English. My interviewees replied according to their retrospection. Unsurprisingly, this concept did not set up a positive image in their mind at first. Rather, it seemed to be a kind of homework-like burden imposed on students no matter whether they liked it or not. For example, ‘I felt that task was sort of homework/assignment, in written form, which was supposed to be done after class and then handed in’ (translated, Interviewee 1, Group 2); ‘I also thought it was assignment that we must finish’ (translated, Interviewee 1, Group 3). Likewise, some other students thought it was like a quiz or test, which seemed even more unwelcome.

Why do Chinese students perceive ‘task’ in this way? To answer this question, we have to bear in mind the cultural difference and language barrier. In western literature which talks about language teaching and learning, task is defined as ‘an



activity which requires learners to use language, with emphasis on meaning, to attain an objective' (Skehan, 2003: 3). However, what students could learn from the English-Chinese or English-English dictionaries in China might be different and superficial. For example, the first explanation given in the dictionary is 'Task: A piece of work assigned or done as part of one's duties'; and the second one is 'Task—A difficult or tedious undertaking.' Clearly, such context-free definitions would not give students any positive impression. Accordingly, when students were asked to connect such a concept with their English learning in the classroom, they would be unlikely to look at it as an enjoyable thing to do.

The difference in the understanding of 'tasks' does exist; nevertheless, it does not mean that there are no learning tasks going on in the language classrooms in China, though not extensively or systematically. Rather, English teaching at all levels involves certain kinds of 'classroom activities' which serve similar purposes as 'tasks', such as to promote interaction and facilitate acquisition. Although not all the so-called 'classroom activities' might be able to qualify as 'tasks' in a strict sense, they do play a significant role in the Chinese context in the same way that a 'task' does in the western context. More importantly, the Chinese translation equivalent of 'activity' is indeed more suitable for the classroom situation and therefore has been widely accepted by both teachers and students.

## 1.4 An overview of the thesis

To conclude this opening chapter, I would like to make an overview of the whole thesis and briefly summarise the main ideas of each individual chapter.

**Chapter 1** serves as an overall *introduction*, including my motivation for this study, theoretical background, and information of the institutional context where the present research was conducted. The main methodological framework (i.e. *3E Framework: Expectation-Experience-Evaluation*) and research questions are introduced as well.

**Chapter 2** is the first part of the literature review which centres on the concept of ‘tasks’. It firstly reviews definitions of ‘task’ and different perspectives of task-based research, and then discusses a few theoretical and practical issues regarding task design in relation to the present research, including task typology, task implementation and a general framework. The purpose of this chapter is to seek literature support in writing ‘*motivating tasks*’ for use in this research.

**Chapter 3** is the second part of the literature review. It begins with an overview of the complexity of *task motivation* and a brief summary of the existing research perspectives of this topic. It then discusses relevant motivation literature at a macro level, a micro level, and from a process-oriented approach, aiming to seek theoretical support in understanding what factors could possibly influence learners’ motivation

for tasks in particular and for English learning in general.

**Chapter 4** is the third part of the literature review which mainly focuses on the *methodological issues* of motivation research. It firstly reviews the methodological changes in this area; and then critiques some key studies of task motivation, and then follows with a plea for a ‘balanced approach’ which attempts to integrate Allwright’s (2003) ‘Exploratory Practice’ into motivation research. Finally, it further explains the proposed framework for this research—3E framework.

**Chapter 5** documents *the natural history of this research*, which begins with some general discussion of research approach and methods, continues with a detailed description of the teaching/data-gathering process, and concludes by describing the proposed way of approaching data, that is, investigating specific task motivation at a *micro* level and exploring general student motivation at a *macro* level.

**Chapter 6** is the first part of the data analysis and discussion, which focuses on task-related data collected respectively at the ‘Expectation’ stage, the ‘Experience’ stage, and the ‘Evaluation’ stage. It further discusses the interaction of three types of motivational resources within task motivation, that is, ‘*academic motivation*’, ‘*personal development motivation*’, and ‘*affective motivation*’.

**Chapter 7** is the second part of the data analysis and discussion, which deals with the remaining data with the purpose of understanding broader learning issues from a motivational perspective. Three types of motivational/demotivational influences are identified, which are specific to the *teacher*, the *learner*, and the *course*.

**Chapter 8** is the final *conclusion* chapter which gives an all-round summary of the research, covering the research background, research methodology, research process, and particularly the research questions and research findings. It also discusses the implications and limitations of this research, followed by suggestions for future research directions.



## **Chapter 2 Literature Review—Motivating Tasks**

### **2.0 Introduction**

This chapter begins with a proposal for integrating the concepts of ‘motivation’ and ‘tasks’ into a classroom-based research study in an authentic educational setting. It continues with an introduction to the definitions and criteria of tasks, followed by a proposed interpretation of tasks in the target research context. Another major section of this chapter discusses various aspects of task design, including a general approach, task classification, my task typology, task implementation, and presents a summarised task framework for this research. In general, task-relevant literature in the area of linguistics is reviewed in the current chapter, whereas motivational theories in the field of psychology will be discussed in the following one.

### **2.1 An integration of ‘motivation’ and ‘tasks’**

The concept of ‘motivation’ comes from the field of psychology which does not seem directly related to the area of linguistics within which the concept of ‘tasks’ falls. Yet neither are these two areas exclusively isolated from each other. In the L2 motivation research field, there has been a growing awareness of the need for the study of task motivation in line with a situation-specific approach and/or a process-orientated approach. In the task research field, likewise, the growing concern about ‘individual variables’ (Skehan, 2003: 7) apart from the task itself could also reflect the implicit attention some researchers have paid to motivational aspects of

tasks. Breen (1987), for example, has brought factors such as learners' purposes and attitudes to the fore so as to remind us of the important role the learner plays in task operation in the classroom. Similarly, Ellis (2003) has mentioned that 'the psychological processes involved in task performance' are one of the dimensions addressed by certain definitions of task (2003: 2).

However, it is interesting to note that the word 'motivating' has not been frequently used to characterise a task in the existing literature. Rather, what is often seen as a standard to judge the quality of a task is how 'effective' it is. Focusing on what Ellis (2000: 208) refers to as 'the inherent properties of the task itself', most researchers who adopt the psycholinguistic approach (e.g. Long, 1983, 1996; Skehan, 1996; Yule, 1997) believe that tasks with certain features could effectively promote classroom interaction and facilitate language acquisition. By contrast, some other researchers who adopt the socio-cultural approach (e.g. Lantolf and Appel, 1994; Donato, 1994; Swain and Lapkin, 2001; Samuda, 2001) are concerned more about 'general factors' such as the teacher, the learner, and the setting (Ellis, 2000: 207), which could be seen as 'attached' features of tasks. In this sense, 'effective' tasks may refer to those which successfully mediate learning thanks to the effective interaction among teachers, learners and tasks within a certain setting.

Whatever the approach, so long as the task functions well in promoting learners'

language development, it could then be regarded as a ‘motivating task’ in terms of its linguistic effectiveness. However, in the authentic educational context, tasks should be properly designed or adapted so as to be motivating in the sense of being psychologically effective as well. The classroom situation, after all, is not like a ‘pseudo-laboratory-type setting’ (Ellis, 2000: 207) where the relationship among the learner, the researcher/teacher, and the environment is comparatively simple. In order for the advocated tasks to work as successfully in the classroom as in the experimental situation, the actual physical and psychological contexts where learners are embedded in should be paid great attention as well (Dörnyei, 2001).

Therefore, I attempted to integrate these two constructs (i.e. ‘tasks’ and ‘motivation’) and the twin perspectives (i.e. linguistic and psychological perspectives) into my study. Different from most of the previous research which attached much importance on the linguistic attributes of tasks, this research aimed to explore more psychological needs of learners in connection with their task choices and task engagement. More importantly, I would investigate these two concepts in a natural classroom setting without creating any particularly controlled conditions. Considering my research purposes mentioned in Chapter I (see 1.2.3), I will in this chapter review the task-relevant literature in the area of *linguistics*, and then turn to motivation theories in the field of *psychology* in the next chapter.



## **2.2 What is ‘task’?**

It is important to begin this section by discussing the definition and criteria of ‘task’, based on the consensus among researchers and educators. I will then put forward a particular definition of this concept which is more appropriate for this study within its particular context.

‘Tasks’ have been variously defined in the existing literature, and the variety of definitions covers areas as general as the entire real world, or as specific as the language classroom. Some key examples have been summarised in an updated list by Ellis (2003: 4-5), including definitions offered by Breen (1989), Long (1985), Richards, Platt, and Weber (1985), Crookes (1986), Prabhu (1987), Nunan (1989), Skehan (1996), Lee (2000), Bygate, Skehan, and Swain (2001).

### **2.2.1 ‘Tasks’ in the real world**

Long’s (1985) more general definition does not set any boundary for where the task may happen, what it may involve, and who may do it. As he suggests, a task is:

‘...a piece of work undertaken for oneself or for others, freely or for some reward. Thus, examples of tasks include painting a fence, dressing a child, filling out a form, buying a pair of shoes, making an airline reservation, borrowing a library book, taking a driving test, typing a letter, weighing a patient, sorting letters, taking a hotel reservation, writing a cheque, finding a street destination and helping someone across a road. In other words, by ‘task’ is meant the hundred and one things people do in everyday life, at work, and in between. “Tasks” are the things people will tell you they do if you ask them and they are not applied linguists’ (Long, 1985: 89).

This definition has been regarded as ‘non-pedagogical’ (Nunan, 1993: 58), for it

neither specifies tasks within an educational context nor limits the task-takers to learners. In other words, tasks could be any activities that anyone does anywhere in the real world. This ‘context-free’ (Kumaravadivelu, 1993: 70) definition contributes to our understanding of the concept of task, and naturally leads to further exploration of its ‘context-sensitive’ (Kumaravadivelu, 1993: 70) definitions.

### **2.2.2 ‘Tasks’ in the field of general education**

Although not stated in Long’s definition, we can nevertheless infer that a task must have an outcome. This point has been made more explicit in two other definitions ‘from the perspective of general education’ (Kumaravadivelu, 1993: 70):

A task is ‘a piece of work or an activity, usually with a specified objective, undertaken as part of an educational course, at work, or used to elicit data for research’ (Crookes, 1986: 1).

A task is ‘an activity which required learners to arrive at an outcome from given information through some process of thoughts, and which allowed teachers to control and regulate that process’ (Prabhu, 1987; cited in Ellis, 2003: 4).

Clearly, these two definitions have not only narrowed the context of tasks down to the field of education, but also explicitly specified what is expected at the end of a task. An ‘objective’ (in Crookes’ definition) can be seen as the end-of-task goal or aim. Similarly, an ‘outcome’ (in Prabhu’s definition) can be seen as the end-of-task result.

### **2.2.3 ‘Tasks’ in the language classroom**

Moving closer to the context of the present research, the definitions of tasks with

regard to language education within classroom settings vary. One of the most frequently quoted examples is:

A task is ‘an activity or action which is carried out as the result of processing or understanding language, i.e. as a response. ... Tasks may or may not involve the production of language. A task usually requires the teacher to specify what will be regarded as successful completion of the task. The use of a variety of different tasks in language teaching is said to make teaching more communicative...since it provides a purpose for classroom activity which goes beyond practice of language for its own sake’ (Richards, Platt, and Weber, 1985: 289).

Compared with the previous examples, this definition is ‘more pedagogically oriented’ (Nunan, 1993: 58) in the sense that it clarifies the requirement a task sets for the teacher as well as the function a task may produce in the language classroom. Similarly, Nunan makes the function more explicit by defining a ‘communicative task’ as

‘a piece of classroom work which involves learners in comprehending, manipulating, producing, or interacting in the target language while their attention is principally focused on meaning rather than form. The task should also have a sense of completeness, being able to stand alone as a communicative act in its own right’ (Nunan, 1989: 10).

Thus, as well as stressing the importance of the ‘end’ of a task, namely, ‘result’ or ‘completeness’, Richards et al’s (1985) and Nunan’s (1989) definitions also draw our attention to the ‘process’ which in their words is supposed to be ‘communicative’. Unlike Long’s (1985) definition which regards almost all possible human activities as tasks, the rather stricter criteria implied in the above pedagogical definitions seem to indicate that not all learning activities in the classroom could qualify as tasks. Swales (1990), for example, criticises a view of tasks as all types of work plans in the classroom. His view, along with Nunan’s (1989) definition, tends to distinguish



‘apparently mechanical tasks’ from ‘apparently communicative tasks’ (Murphy, 1993: 140), with the former being labelled as ‘simple and brief exercise type’ (Swales, 1990: 74) and the latter being considered more appropriate for task-based teaching and learning.

#### **2.2.4 ‘Tasks’ in my specific research context**

Despite the fact that communicative tasks have received more recognition and support from researchers and educators in ELT, it is still necessary to bear in mind that the same concept may not be interpreted in exactly the same way in different contexts. When language teachers are going to introduce a new teaching/learning concept to their classes, they should take the contextual factors into account and make proper adaptations so as to make the best of it. If learners are rigidly ‘forced’ to accept something, the results are unlikely to be satisfactory no matter how good such a thing is in principle.

As far as communicative tasks are concerned, whilst a number of studies testify to their contribution to second/foreign language acquisition, other studies equally point out that it is not universally applicable that any level of learners could benefit from such tasks. There are a few questions worth thinking about: in a concrete educational context, to what extent do the teachers and learners understand the criteria of tasks? Are there any task materials available for teachers? How much time can teachers afford to task design before class and to task implementation in class? How can one

guarantee that the use of communicative tasks could well serve the purpose of the on-going curriculum?

Drawing upon other researchers' definitions discussed earlier, and keeping the above questions in mind, I am now going to clarify my standpoint regarding the notion of tasks in my research context by making the following points:

Firstly, I planned to use loosely defined tasks in this research, partly because 'tasks' would just be a medium for exploring my participants' language learning motivation; and partly because there was insufficient knowledge of tasks among most teachers and students in my target research context. It was an attempt to see to what extent the theoretically advocated 'tasks' could be adapted and incorporated into the traditional English class. As I introduced in the first chapter, my target class was Advanced English Reading class in which a prescribed textbook was used, and it required advanced language learners to understand the meaning of the given texts thoroughly. According to my personal experience of taking this module and what I have heard from other schoolmates, there were hardly any real 'tasks' implemented in similar Reading classes. Most of the class time was spent on studying the texts intensively, with the teacher paraphrasing sentences, explaining new words, and analysing the implied meanings, whereas students listening attentively and taking notes. There might be some classroom activities at certain point, but mostly in the shape of

asking/answering questions or doing/checking textbook exercises.

Therefore, I was going to introduce some more communicative learning activities in my target class, aiming to promote more classroom interaction, more teacher-student talk and more organised peer discussion. At the same time, all my proposed tasks would essentially be intended to facilitate the teaching of this reading textbook, as I did not want to abandon the existing curriculum or simply borrow some ready-made ‘tasks’ randomly from the professional task books. Upon this consideration, I would prefer to regard all my purposely designed classroom activities as tasks, so long as they could be obviously differentiated from teacher presentation, pure question-answer sessions, and other traditional exercises. Actually a similar point has been stated by Murphy (1993) when he tries to give support to mechanical tasks, ‘...how difficult it is to argue, in the present state of our knowledge, that there are activities which cannot be admitted to the gallery of language learning tasks’ (1993: 142).

Secondly, I would also like to specify some criteria which could fit with my proposed definition of task, and make my designed tasks serve my research and pedagogical purposes. In the literature, Ellis (2003) has provided the most comprehensive criterial features to date:

1. A task is a workplan.
2. A task involves a primary focus on meaning.



3. A task involves real-world processes of language use.
4. A task can involve any of the four language skills.
5. A task engages cognitive processes.
6. A task has a clearly defined communicative outcome. (Ellis, 2003: 9-10)

Taking my research context and the actual teaching/learning conditions into consideration, I would just select some of these criteria for use. Number 1, 2, and 4 could go into my criteria basket as they are. For number 3, 5, and 6, I made a little adjustment. Put clearly, I was going to direct my students' attention to the 'process' rather than the 'outcome', because some of my designed tasks might or might not have an 'end'. Moreover, the process was supposed to be as 'communicative' as possible, and students would be required to make 'cognitive' efforts. However, there might not necessarily be a 'real-world' relationship, as some of the tasks would just aim to facilitate students' comprehension of an artificial reading material. Here is a brief summary of the criteria I propose: a) the task is part of a teaching plan, which may involve any of the four language skills (i.e. listening, speaking, reading, writing), and should primarily be focused on meaning; b) the task requires students to pay great attention to communicative and cognitive processes; c) a real-world relationship is ideal but not a must.

Thirdly, all the tasks would be designed on the basis of the textbook prescribed in my research context, though task materials were not available or ready for use. Rather, the designed tasks must be relevant to the given textbook, with content being either based on a particular text, or related to the text topic. In other words, the tasks should

fall within the existing curriculum, and ideally should facilitate normal English teaching without disturbing the overall schedule of this university. In this sense, tasks could be regarded as a helping tool, which would not change radically the nature of the normal class. It was hoped that the teaching and learning situations could remain as true to normal practice as possible.

## 2.3 Task design

The issue of task design is not only an interest of linguists working on task-related research, but also a concern of teachers who implement tasks in their classrooms.

With full respect to the research findings in this connection, I will now talk about several relevant aspects regarding designing appropriate tasks within the context of this study, which could be seen as general guidelines.

### 2.3.1 A general approach

At the outset, it is necessary to present a general approach to language teaching in the target context in which tasks are going to be introduced. According to the literature, there are mainly two ways of viewing tasks in language teaching, i.e. *task-supported* language teaching and *task-based* language teaching.

As Ellis (2003) points out, the distinction between the above two approaches parallels the distinction between a *weak* and a *strong* version of communicative language teaching (CLT). In terms of the weak version, it ‘views tasks as a way of

providing communicative practice for language items that have been introduced in a more traditional way' (Ellis, 2003: 29). This coincides with task-supported language teaching which mainly focuses on the teaching of specific language features (forms), and then provides learners with practising opportunities by means of tasks. In this sense, task-supported language teaching is basically characterised by a traditional methodological procedure consisting of present-practise-produce (PPP) (Gower and Walters, 1983), although some other forms may exist as well.

In contrast, task-based language teaching constitutes a strong version of CLT which 'sees tasks as a means of enabling learners to learn a language by experiencing how it is used in communication' (Ellis, 2003: 28). Teachers who adopt this approach tend to teach the target language at a macro level, covering not only the concrete language items (such as vocabulary and grammar) but also the comprehensive use of the language (i.e. listening, speaking, reading, and writing). More importantly, as Kumaravadivelu (1993) points out, task-based teaching puts more emphasis on the process (i.e. how learners learn the language) than on the target (i.e. what learners are supposed to learn).

As far as my target teaching context is concerned, it seems neither a task-supported nor a task-based approach could be perfectly fitted into it. On the one hand, my empirical study would involve teaching an advanced reading course to university



students, focusing on the overall comprehension of difficult and complicated texts rather than on any particular language items suited to a task-supported approach. On the other hand, a heavily task-based programme might not be appropriate for the systematic teaching of this ‘traditional’ textbook in this context either, as not all of the teaching aims of this module can be achieved by means of tasks only. As Swan (2005) points out, ‘the naturalistic communication-driven pedagogy characteristic of TBI (Task-based instruction)’ indicates that ‘its exclusive use is particularly unsuitable for exposure-poor contexts where time is limited’ (2005: 397).

Generally speaking, my proposed approach to language teaching stands somewhere in between, but much closer to the task-based end. The role tasks were expected to play in the present research was to help make the existing curriculum more communicative and motivating. That is to say, instead of planning a totally new communicative curriculum, I was attempting to incorporate some communicative tasks into the target course without abandoning the prescribed textbook and scheduled curriculum.

In this regard, one of the suggested approaches to task-based teaching, namely, ‘process syllabus’ (advocated by Breen, 1987; and Candlin, 1987), seems more relevant to my study. As Ellis (2003) says, such a syllabus ‘is constructed through negotiation between the teacher and the students’ (2003: 32). The point which

attracts me most is learners' contribution in the learning process: giving voice to their needs and interests, joining in the lesson planning, as well as making reflections and evaluations (Breen, 1987). In addition, Candlin (1987) also points out the important role that teachers should play in considering and analysing students' opinions in order to make the teaching process reasonable and manageable.

### **2.3.2 Task classification**

Ellis has clearly stated the importance of task classification as follows (Ellis, 2003: 211):

'First, it provides a basis for ensuring variety;...Second, it can be used to identify the task types that match the specific needs or preferences of particular groups of learners. Third, it affords teachers a framework for experimenting with tasks in their classrooms; they can systematically try out the different types of tasks to discover which tasks work for their students.'

Before developing a typology of tasks which suits my target teaching and research context, I will first present a brief overview of the various ways of classifying tasks proposed by different researchers.

In the existing literature, a commonly accepted typology is Willis' (1996) pedagogic classification of tasks, including 1) Listing; 2) Ordering and sorting; 3) Comparing; 4) Problem solving; 5) Sharing personal experiences; and 6) Creative tasks (1996: 26-27). According to the levels of difficulty and complexity, learners are required to carry out different kinds of operations in performing tasks. The first three types of

task may only require learners to deal with the given information (e.g. facts, items, and events) in a simple and straightforward way. Comparatively, the fourth type of task (i.e. problem solving) is more demanding and challenging, as it requires more ‘intellectual and reasoning powers’ of learners (Willis, 1996: 27). The last two types of task, namely, ‘Sharing personal experiences’ and ‘Creative tasks’, expect more initiatives from learners but at the same time offer them more freedom in performing the task. There may not be enough given information for learners to work on; rather, learners are encouraged to get the task going by actively using their own knowledge, experiences, and imagination.

Though not exhaustive, this classification nevertheless functions as a useful referential framework and helps to generate a variety of actual tasks for pedagogic purposes (Ellis, 2003). Furthermore, Willis (1996) also suggests a range of designs for text-based tasks, aiming to ‘encourage natural and efficient reading/listening/viewing strategies, focusing initially on retrieval of sufficient relevant meaning for the purpose of the task’ (1996: 75). The six types she illustrates in this regard include 1) Prediction tasks; 2) Jumbles; 3) Restoration tasks; 4) Jigsaw/split information tasks; 5) Comparison tasks; and 6) Memory challenge tasks (Willis, 1996: 75-76). Generally speaking, these task types could be incorporated into a reading course, because the given information of a task is mainly selected from a particular text. Teachers could either rely on a series of systematically designed tasks to carry out the reading course, or design certain tasks as needed to facilitate their



teaching. In either case, what should be kept in mind is the difficulty level of the reading course in question and the learning needs of target students, as contextual factors of such kinds may affect the actual effectiveness of certain tasks.

Apart from the above pedagogic classification, researchers from the SLA field have also suggested some other ways in which tasks are viewed from different perspectives. For example, Pica, Kanagy, and Falodun (1993) proposed a classificatory system in relation to the potential of tasks for language learning. Ellis (2003) sees it as a ‘psycholinguistic classification’ as it is ‘based on interactional categories that have been shown to affect the opportunities learners have to comprehend input, obtain feedback, and modify their own output’ (2003: 215). Five task types are labelled (i.e. Jigsaw, Information gap, Problem solving, Decision making, and Opinion exchange) according to four criteria: 1) Interactant relationship; 2) Interaction requirement; 3) Goal orientation; and 4) Outcome options (for details, see Pica, Kanagy, and Falodun, 1993: 18-23).

Another example is what Ellis (2003: 46-47) has called a ‘cognitive classification’ based on Prabhu’s (1987) way of distinguishing three general types of tasks in terms of the kind of cognitive activity involved:

- 1) Information gap activity involves ‘a transfer of given information from one person to another—or from one form to another, or from one place to another—generally calling for the encoding or decoding of information from or into language’.
- 2) Reasoning gap activity involves ‘deriving some new information from given

information through processes of inference, deduction, practical reasoning, or a perception of relationship or patterns’.

- 3) Opinion-gap activity involves ‘identifying and articulating a personal preference, feeling, or attitude in response to a given situation’.

Similar to Willis’ (1996) pedagogic classification, the above three types of task reflect three levels of required cognitive operations which are increasingly complex and demanding. This does not necessarily mean that the first type suits lower levels of language learners whereas the third type suits higher. Rather, this general classification could afford teachers a guideline for designing actual tasks appropriate for their students.

Compared with the above mentioned general classifications, some others categorise a few specific types of task. For example (Julkunen, 2001: 34):

- 1) ‘Memory tasks’, in which ‘the student is supposed to recognise or reproduce previously encountered information’;
- 2) ‘Procedural or routine tasks’, require that ‘the student applies a standardised and predictable formula or algorithm to produce an answer or to solve a problem’;
- 3) ‘Comprehension or understanding tasks’, in which ‘the student is expected to (a) recognise transformed versions of previously encountered information, (b) apply procedures to new problems, or (c) draw inferences from previously encountered information or procedures’;
- 4) ‘Opinion tasks’, in which ‘students have to express preferences for something’.

The names of these four task categories sound more straightforward and might give us an idea of what kinds of cognitive operations are involved in doing the task. In a sense, this classification largely overlaps with Prabhu’s (1987) general classification

in that they both focus on the cognitive activity involved. For example, comprehension/understanding tasks mainly involve reasoning gap activity; and opinion tasks mainly involve opinion gap activity.

By bringing out the above selected examples of task classification, I hope to build up some connections between the existing theory and my proposed task typology that I am going to discuss. All in all, tasks should be carefully selected and designed in order to motivate the target students best and to suit the specific context best.

### **2.3.3 My task typology**

My proposed task typology is based partly on the above theoretical knowledge and partly on my analysis of the prescribed textbook (i.e. A New English Course—Level 7) that I would be using in practice. It was largely informed by Julkunen's (2001) article in which four types of task (i.e. memory task, procedural or routine task, comprehension or understanding task, and opinion task) are categorised according to the cognitive operations involved in doing tasks. In view of the suitability for my target research participants and the target course, I included the last two categories only in my classification, that is, *comprehension/understanding* tasks and *opinion* tasks.

#### **2.3.3.1 Comprehension/Understanding tasks**

In this particular module, English majors were supposed not only to enlarge their



vocabulary, learn isolated language items, and deal with fragmented information; but more importantly understand difficult and complex reading materials and obtain further training in comprehensive use of language skills. Therefore, this group of tasks aimed, at appropriate points, to facilitate the teaching and help students make sense of the texts *per se*. Reading comprehension activities would target both language and content, covering different aspects such as a particular part of the text, the overall organisation and development, the main theme, the writing style and the implication. In view of the close relation between the text content and the task in question, I would regard the comprehension/understanding tasks as ‘*text-related*’ tasks. Moreover, considering that such tasks might only focus students’ attention on learning English within the classroom, I would see them as a means of exploring students’ task motivation at a *micro* level.

### 2.3.3.2 Opinion tasks

However, students’ attention should be directed to the real world outside the classroom as well, as they are also human beings in the wider community which is local, national, or even international. Therefore, opinion tasks aimed to relate language learning to students’ real life by promoting a deeper and broader thinking of the text topics discussed by British and American authors in the textbook. It might be interesting to encourage students to reflect on their own life in the Chinese context regarding similar topics, or to elicit students’ opinions about western values and practices from their own perspectives. It was hoped that these tasks could encourage

my students to develop their analytical, critical and independent thinking; and help them learn to express themselves clearly, systematically, and logically. In a sense, opinion tasks would only be ‘*topic-related*’, as the cognitive activity involved would have little to do with the language or content of the text in consideration. By means of these tasks, I hoped learners could learn something apart from English, and I could understand their various motivations at a *macro* level from a ‘humanistic approach’ (Ellis, 2003: 31).

## **2.3.4 Task implementation**

### **2.3.4.1 Sequencing and positioning the tasks**

In view of the prescribed textbook and school curriculum, I might not have much freedom in choosing the thematic topics for tasks. Basically, the 14 units from the textbook would be the predetermined topics for my proposed tasks, whether comprehension/understanding tasks or opinion tasks. What I could do was to re-order the 14 units, partly based on my participants’ interests and preferences and partly based on my overall teaching plan.

Specifically speaking, there were two points to consider in terms of task implementation. First, I was planning to design each type of task for about half of the 14 units, which would ideally be conducted alternately. However, it was more important to consider the actual need, as perhaps certain text topics would be found suitable for designing opinion tasks, while others for comprehension tasks. In this

aspect, van Lier's (1991) two dimensions of teaching—planning and improvisation—should be borne in mind as a useful guideline.

The second point concerned when to implement tasks. In the target class, there might be three stages available, that is, before, during, or after a particular reading text was being taught. In general, opinion tasks could be implemented at the pre-reading or post-reading stage in view of their 'topic-related' nature; whereas comprehension/understanding tasks would be more likely to go to the while-reading stage due to their 'text-related' nature. It should be made clear that it was definitely impossible to go through all the three stages within one class period (i.e. 50 minutes). According to the normal practice, the middle stage for detailed analysis and explanation of a given text could be as long as 3 or 4 class periods depending on the text length and complexity. In this case, the point of incorporating tasks remained a vague concept for the moment, and could only be finally decided according to the teaching and learning needs during the process.

#### **2.3.4.2 Participatory structure**

Participatory structure is an important aspect of task implementation, referring to 'the procedures that govern how the teacher's and students' contributions to the performance of the task are organised' (Ellis, 2003: 263). Simply speaking, it may answer the question—'in what way tasks can be implemented'. Basically there are four ways that are commonly used in classroom practice (Ellis, 2003):



- 1) Individual student work, i.e. each student works with tasks on his own;
- 2) Pair work, i.e. students work with tasks in pairs;
- 3) Group work, i.e. students work with tasks in groups (there should be more than two students in each group);
- 4) Whole-class work, i.e. students work with tasks together in a whole-class context.

Ellis (2003) offers a comprehensive review of the advantages and disadvantages of these ways of performing tasks, drawing on some other researchers’ (e.g. Prabhu 1987; Nunan 1989; Jacobs, 1998; Wells, 1999) and his own viewpoints. Based on this overview, I summarised the key points in the following table:

	Advantages	Disadvantages
Individual student work	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>◆ caters to individual differences</li><li>◆ fosters independence/autonomy</li><li>◆ encourages self-directedness</li><li>◆ enables private manipulation</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>◆ limited capacities of individual learner</li><li>◆ lack of strategic competence</li></ul>
Group work and pair work	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>◆ increased quantity of learner speech</li><li>◆ increased variety of speech acts</li><li>◆ individualisation of instruction</li><li>◆ anxiety can be reduced</li><li>◆ motivation can increase</li><li>◆ enjoyment can increase</li><li>◆ independence can increase</li><li>◆ social integration can increase</li><li>◆ learn to work together with others</li><li>◆ learning can increase</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>◆ does not ensure the conditions needed to achieve satisfactory task outcomes or language learning</li><li>◆ less likelihood of exposure to ‘good models’ of English</li><li>◆ not being conducive to students paying attention to form</li><li>◆ physical characteristics of classroom may impede interaction</li><li>◆ unequal contribution</li><li>◆ overuse of native language</li></ul>
Whole-class work	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>◆ teacher talk can ensure comprehensible input</li><li>◆ teacher’s special role in conducting ‘instructional conversations’</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>◆ the accomplishment of skilled teacher talk can be problematic</li><li>◆ too much teacher talk may impede learning</li></ul>

Table 2-1: Advantages and disadvantages of participatory structures  
(based on Ellis, 2003: 263-275)

In general, all of the above comments result from both linguistic consideration (such as increased quantity of learner speech) and psychological consideration (such as motivation, anxiety, and enjoyment) of the effectiveness of each structure. This corresponds with my research aim which is to explore motivating tasks that are both linguistically effective and psychologically effective. With full respect, I would like to incorporate these different participatory structures into my task implementation on various occasions, and see how they could fit with my target research context by listening to learners’ voices.

2.3.5 A general framework

Table 2-2 offers a brief summary of what I have discussed in this chapter:

Task types	(When)	(What)		(How)	(Why)
	Stage	Content	Language skills	Participatory structure	Underlying motives
Comprehension/ understanding tasks	While- reading	Text- related	Listening Speaking Reading Writing	Individually, Pair work, Group work, Whole-class	?  To be explored
Opinion tasks	Pre- or post- reading	Topic- related			

Table 2-2: A general framework for task design

This table would serve as a guideline for me to design tasks, though not everything could be prepared well in advance. Since my fieldwork and data collection would be

conducted in authentic classrooms, there were bound to be lots of contextual factors for me to take into consideration. Details about the actual teaching and researching process will be reported later in Chapter 5.

## **2.4 Conclusion**

It was firstly clarified that the present study was intended to research on ‘tasks’ and ‘motivation’ in an authentic classroom situation. Then the chapter focused on a few task-relevant issues, including theoretical viewpoints in the existing literature and practical considerations of the target research context. Specifically speaking, the first major section reviewed the definitions and criteria of tasks suggested and commonly accepted by most researchers in this area, based on which I proposed a loosely defined concept of ‘tasks’ and specified relevant criterial features for this study in view of its contextual factors, stressing that my proposed tasks would be part of my teaching plan which should fall within the existing curriculum. The second major section concerned various aspects of task design and task implementation. As a final summary, a general framework for designing tasks in the target research context was presented.



## **Chapter 3 Literature Review—Task Motivation**

### **3.0 Introduction**

This chapter reviews the relevant literature in the field of psychology, with a primary focus on task motivation. It consists of four major sections. The first one examines the complexity of task motivation and briefly summarises the existing research perspectives on this topic, based on which relevant theoretical discussions are organised in the following three sections (i.e. 3.2-3.4). Section 3.2 explores some theories on generalised motivation, including Gardner's theory, self-determination theory, and goal theory. Section 3.3 focuses on the discussion of situation- and task-specific motivation, including expectancy-value theory and two comprehensive frameworks of L2 motivation by Dörnyei (1994) and Williams and Burden (1997). Section 3.4 reviews the process-oriented approach to task motivation proposed by Dörnyei (1998), and in particular discusses how this approach can be applied to the present study without abandoning the traditional generalised/situational perspective.

### **3.1 The complexity of task motivation**

Taking tasks as the basic level of motivational analysis is a comparatively new approach which has not received much attention from researchers until recently. Prompted by the 'motivational renaissance' (Gardner and Tremblay, 1994) in the 1990s, this approach not only draws on the development of previous motivation studies, but also grows into a fruitful direction for future research. As Dörnyei (2003)

says, the study of task motivation can complement the ongoing efforts in task-based research in an organic manner. In recent years, L2 motivation studies have seen an increased focus on concrete classroom situations and specific language behaviours. In this regard, language learning tasks and activities are seen as appropriate and researchable behavioural units because they ‘constitute the basic building blocks of classroom learning, and accordingly, L2 motivation can hardly be examined in a more situated manner than within a task-based framework’ (Dörnyei, 2003: 14).

A variety of definitions of ‘task’ has been discussed in detail in Chapter 2, mainly based on the linguistic literature. However, the concept of ‘task motivation’ has not been explicitly defined in the motivational theories. Despite the lack of a clear definition, it could still be inferred from a number of key studies into task motivation that this concept may be understood from two aspects: 1) when focusing on ‘tasks’, ‘task motivation refers to the characteristics of the task, to task design’ (Julkunen, 2001: 33); 2) when focusing on ‘task-takers’, the study of task motivation is to explore ‘the motivational basis of language learning tasks’ (Dörnyei, 2003: 14), or, in other words, to understand ‘the motivational processes fuelling the quantity and quality of learners’ on-task behaviour’ (Dörnyei, 2002: 138). However task motivation is interpreted, my research purposes in this study seem to correspond to the above two aspects to a great extent (see 1.2.3). The first one has been discussed in the previous chapter, concerning various aspects of task design that could make a task motivating. The present chapter is devoted to the second aspect, concerning the

possible underlying sources of learners' motivations for tasks.

Though engaging in a specific task takes only a tiny portion of a learner's lengthy process of mastering a language, it should not be simply treated as an isolated behaviour. When a learner comes to a task, his previously built-in motivational orientations and attitudes will certainly influence how he responds to the task. These relatively stable and enduring dispositions are regarded as '*trait motivation*' by Tremblay, Goldberg and Gardner (1995). On the other hand, the specific task characteristics and the situation in which a particular task is embedded in will also trigger the learner's temporary responses or conditions, known as '*state motivation*' (ibid). This basic distinction has much in common with what Boekaerts (1987a, 1987b, cited in Julkunen, 2001) calls 'motivation as a trait' and 'motivation as a state', the former referring to 'the learner's general motivational orientation', and the latter 'his/her situation specific motivation' (Julkunen, 2001: 30).

Sharing the same ground as Boekaerts' conceptualisation, Julkunen (1989, 2001) suggests, based on relevant empirical studies, that task motivation is a composite of two motivational sources, that is, 'generalised, task-independent factors' and 'situation-specific, task-dependent factors' (Dörnyei, 2002: 139). As he says, 'task motivation depends partly on general motivation and partly on the unique way the student perceives the task' (Julkunen, 2001: 33, cf. Boekaerts, 1993).



Without denying the meaning of the trait/state approach, Dörnyei (2002) points out its weakness in conceptualising task motivation, that is, ‘it suggests a rather static conception’ (2002: 139). He instead contends that a more accurate characterisation may be provided by taking a process-oriented approach, looking at the dynamic motivational processes that take place during task completion’ (ibid). Apart from receiving empirical support from a study by MacIntyre, MacMaster and Baker (2001), Dörnyei also conducted a series of research studies together with Kormos in this regard (see Dörnyei and Kormos, 2000; Dörnyei, 2002; Kormos and Dörnyei, 2004). Their findings confirm the complexity of task motivation, and further imply that apart from the most immediate task situation, a number of broader actional contexts may influence learners’ on-task behaviours as well. In sum, Dörnyei (2002) argues that

‘it may be insufficient to assume that the learner enters the task situation with some ‘trait motivation baggage’ and to obtain task motivation with ‘baggage’ needs to be pooled with the motivational properties of the instructional task. Instead, engaging in a certain task activates a number of different levels of related motivational mindsets and contingencies, resulting in complex interferences’ (2002: 156).

With respect to the above scholars’ important contribution and its relevance to my research, I attempted to integrate the trait/state approach with a process-oriented approach in exploring task motivation. That is to say, I would look at both general and situation-/task-specific motivational factors, and ‘embed’ the entire study into an identifiable learning process which would involve a series of task implementations. As I mentioned earlier, the unique feature of this study is that its data would be collected in an authentic classroom setting, and the tailor-made tasks would be

integrated into normal teaching rather than conducted under ‘laboratory’ conditions. Therefore, the influences of ‘broader actional contexts’ on the participants’ task motivation would be fully respected and considered.

In the following sections, I will review some relevant literature in the psychology area. Basically, I will look at theoretical discussion of generalised motivation at a macro level, and of situational motivation at a micro level. Then I will talk about the process-oriented approach to task motivation from both a theoretical and a practical point of view, in connection with the design of the present research.

## **3.2 Generalised motivation at a macro level**

In this regard, I am going to review three motivation theories, that is, Gardner’s theory from a social psychological perspective, self-determination theory and goal theory from a cognitive perspective. In general, these theories are all more related to learners’ long-term goals and purposes of mastering a language, but comparatively less concerned with the specific task situations and concrete contextual factors.

### **3.2.1 Gardner’s theory**

To begin with, Gardner and his colleagues’ research into L2 motivation in the 1970s (e.g. Gardner and Tremblay, 1972; Gardner, 1985) has been widely regarded as the seminal work as it ‘put L2 learning motivation on the map as a very important issue and provided the current theoretical underpinnings’ (Oxford and Shearin, 1994: 16).

One of the most popularly known aspects of Gardner's theory (especially the 'socio-educational model of second language acquisition') is the conceptualisation of integrative and instrumental orientation/motivation. This dichotomy has been so well-known for decades, and has been seen as 'perhaps the most succinct and accessible explanation to be found' (Oxford, 1994: 513). Despite the great respect for this contribution, researchers are more aware that the complexity of motivation may not be fully explained by the above two motivational components, especially in the increasingly diversified language learning contexts. While Gardner and his associates themselves endeavour to expand and elaborate their theories (e.g. Tremblay and Gardner, 1995; Gardner 2000, 2001), some other interested researchers have conducted studies which provide empirical support on the one hand, and highlight the limitations of the social psychological approach on the other.

From Gardner's social psychological perspective, *motivation* reflects a learner's desire, attitude, and effort, to attain a goal, while this goal is reflected in the learner's *orientation*. As more L2 motivational theories develop in recent years, 'integrative orientation/motivation' has sometimes been re-conceptualised as 'an interpersonal/affective dimension'; whereas 'instrumental orientation/motivation' as 'a practical/utilitarian dimension' (Dörnyei, 2005: 70). In whatever terms, the notion is to distinguish between two types of L2 learners in a broad sense, according to their different purposes of learning a second/foreign language which are either to identify with the target language community or to achieve pragmatic benefits (Gardner and



Lambert, 1972; Gardner, 1985).

While acknowledging the applicability of this dichotomy and the social psychological approach in L2 motivation research, a series of discussions and debates in the 1990s also remind us of the limitations. For example, motivation identified from this approach is mainly related to long-term goals and purposes which may not take into account the ‘here-and-now interest in the task, the joy of exploration or working together, natural curiosity, and other factors operating in the immediate learning context’ (van Lier, 1996: 105). Meanwhile, without putting a balanced emphasis on both types of motivation (i.e. integrative vs. instrumental motivation), Gardner’s theory resulted in a widely accepted misunderstanding that integratively motivated learners would be more likely to achieve success in language learning. This point of view seems to be problematic because some studies have supported prominence of instrumental motivation in the acquisition of a second or foreign language (e.g., Kruidenier and Clément, 1986; Samimy and Tabuse, 1992). Moreover, Gardner’s theory seems to have left an impression that instrumental and integrative motivations usually do not co-exist in learners’ minds. In other words, a learner can only have either one or other type of motivation when learning a language. However, in a specific context at a specific developmental stage, is it possible for a learner to have both types of motivations? Under the ever-changing learning conditions, does a learner’s motivation change from time to time as well?

To sum up, all the questions about Gardner's theory boil down to the fact that his social-psychological approach mainly offers a 'macro perspective' (Dörnyei, 2003) to look at learners' general motivational pattern in the shape of their long-term orientations. Though the 'attitudes towards the learning environment' are included as an important factor in Gardner's approach, such attitudes did not receive sufficient attention from L2 motivation researchers until the 1990s. It was then that more researchers started to show greater consideration to the various motivational aspects in the concrete language learning contexts, and attempted to 'conceptualise motivation in such a way that it would have explanatory power with regard to specific language learning tasks and behaviours and not just broad, whole-community-level social tendencies' (Dörnyei, 1998: 124).

### **3.2.2 Self-determination theory**

Self-determination theory (Deci and Ryan, 1985, 2002; Ryan and Deci, 2000) has been one of the most influential cognitive approaches in mainstream motivational psychology, and has only relatively recently been incorporated into L2 motivation research. It allows researchers to 'distinguish between different types of motivation based on the different reasons or goals that give rise to an action' (Ryan and Deci, 2000: 55). Its basic constructs are *intrinsic* motivation and *extrinsic* motivation, with the former one referring to doing something for its inherent interest or enjoyment, and the latter one for its instrumental value or other separable outcomes (Ryan and Deci, 2000).

### **3.2.2.1 Intrinsic motivation**

Intrinsic motivation is seen to exist not only ‘within individuals’, but also ‘in the nexus between a person and a task’ (Ryan and Deci, 2000: 56). In the latter sense, Ryan and Deci (2000) further explain that intrinsic motivation can be defined either ‘in terms of the task being interesting’ according to Skinner’s (1953) ‘operant theory’, or ‘in terms of the satisfaction a person gains from intrinsically motivated task engagement’ based on Hull’s (1943) ‘learning theory’ (ibid). These twin definitions correspond to my research purposes in that the former one centres on task-intrinsic linguistic and psychological features perceived to be motivating, whereas the latter one concerns learner-intrinsic motivational processes during task engagement. As indicated, the previous chapter has touched upon various aspects of tasks in order to understand what features could make a task motivating; while in the current chapter, I shall turn to explore what basic psychological needs can be satisfied by the tasks and how these needs are shaped by various factors within a specific learning context.

As regards ‘basic psychological needs’ which underpin intrinsic motivation, they have been defined in terms of the innate needs for ‘relatedness’, ‘competence’, and ‘autonomy’ (Deci and Ryan, 2002). ‘*Relatedness* refers to feeling connected to others, to caring for and being cared for by those others, to having a sense of belongingness both with other individuals and with one’s community’ (2002: 7). ‘*Competence* refers to feeling effective in one’s ongoing interactions with the social environment and



experiencing opportunities to exercise and express one's capacities' (2002: 7). 'Autonomy refers to being the perceived origin or source of one's own behaviour' (2002: 8). In classroom settings, these needs can be interpreted as three issues worth noticing in order to enhance student motivation. First, students have the need to feel respected and cared for by the teacher, and to feel belongingness with their class and class fellows. Second, students would need to understand what they are asked to do or achieve (e.g. an extrinsic goal), and feel competent and efficacious in succeeding at it, with necessary skills and supports. Third, an autonomy supportive context is important if teachers want their students to inwardly grasp the meaning and value of an originally external regulation.

### **3.2.2.2 Extrinsic motivation**

As learners grow up from early childhood to maturity, their intrinsic motivation 'becomes weaker with each advancing grade' (Ryan and Deci, 2000: 60). In this case, it is crucially important to identify learners' extrinsic motivation which may possibly help engage them in non-intrinsically motivating tasks. With such awareness, Deci and Ryan (2000; 2002) revisit the classic intrinsic/extrinsic distinction and describe a model of different types of extrinsic motivation. This model represents a subtheory—*Organismic Integration Theory*—in the shape of a continuum of types of extrinsic motivation in terms of the extent to which the individuals 'tend to internalise the activity's initially external regulation' (Deci and Ryan, 2002: 15). That is to say, the more one becomes self-regulated, the closer one's motivation is to the

intrinsic end of the self-determination continuum (see Table 3-1 below).

Type of motivation	Amotivation	Extrinsic motivation				Intrinsic motivation
Type of regulation	Non-regulation	External regulation	Introjected regulation	Identified regulation	Integrated regulation	Intrinsic regulation
Quality of behaviour	(Nonself-determined)			(Self-determined)		

Table 3-1: The Self-Determination Continuum.

(Deci and Ryan, 2002: 16)

The Table shows that there are four types of extrinsic motivation according to the different types of regulation involved. Further from the intrinsic motivation end, ‘*external regulation*’ and ‘*introjected regulation*’ are seen as less autonomous forms of extrinsic motivation which are less likely to lead to self-determined behaviour. The common reason for engaging in a behaviour based on the above two types of regulation is to either avoid punishment or obtain rewards; whereas the difference between them lies in the source of punishment or rewards. Specifically speaking, performing an externally regulated behaviour is to avoid being punished by others or to receive rewards given by others. However, the punishment or rewards for introjectedly motivated people are from within, in the shape of a sense of guilt or feelings of worth (Deci and Ryan, 2002: 17).

By contrast, ‘*identified regulation*’ and ‘*integrated regulation*’ are more autonomous forms which are supposed to lead to more self-determined behaviour. They are closer

to the intrinsic motivation end of the continuum, and therefore could be very helpful when sometimes people are not motivated intrinsically. The salient feature of these two types of extrinsic motivation is that they may ‘transform external regulation into true self-regulation’ (ibid). In other words, behaviours stemming from identification and integration reflect the fact that individuals have consciously internalised the initially external goals, values, and expectations.

Generally speaking, incorporating self-determination theory and its motivational constructs into L2 motivation research is a very important development. The concepts of intrinsic motivation and four types of extrinsic motivation have proved to be useful in explaining learner’s learning behaviours and the reasons underlying their different levels of engagement in the given tasks. Though not mainly focusing on specific situational aspects, this theory together with Gardner’s theory has great explanatory power in understanding learners’ task motivation. Both theories are concerned with learners’ general motivational orientations, psychological needs, learning purposes and goals. In this connection, it is useful to include discussion of goal theories which may further help explain how learners respond to tasks according to their goals.

### **3.2.3 Goal theories**

There are two well-known goal theories that have been often referred to in the psychological literature. The first one is Locke and Latham’s (1994) *goal-setting*



*theory* which ‘asserts that human action is caused by purposes, and for action to take place, goals have to be set and pursued by choice’ (Dörnyei, 1998: 120). The second one is *goal orientation theory* which ‘was specifically developed to explain children’s learning and performance in school settings’ (Dörnyei, 1998: 121). In this aspect, two kinds of orientations, i.e. *mastery orientation* and *performance orientation*, have been identified according to whether the learner tends to focus on ‘learning the content’ or on ‘demonstrating ability, getting good grades, or outdoing other students’ (ibid; based on Ames, 1992). Referring back to other motivation literature mentioned earlier, it can be seen that *mastery orientation* is more closely associated with ‘integrative motivation’ (Gardner, 1985) and ‘intrinsic motivation’ (Deci and Ryan, 1985), whereas *performance orientation* with ‘instrumental motivation’ (Gardner, 1985) and ‘extrinsic motivation’ (Deci and Ryan, 1985).

### 3.2.3.1 Goal mechanisms

Regardless of the different goal theories, there is a common theme which highlights the important functions of ‘goals’. Generally speaking, different goals may direct people to behave in different ways with different amounts of effort. More specifically, Locke and Latham (1994) list three direct mechanisms by which goals affect performance:

- 1) Goals direct activity toward actions that are goal relevant to it at the expense of actions that are not relevant;
- 2) Goals regulate effort expenditure in that people adjust their effort to the different level of the task or goal;
- 3) Goals affect the persistence of action in situations where there are no time limits.

Moreover, Locke and Latham (1994) point out that when the above mechanisms are not sufficient to attain a goal, individuals may seek new strategies that are more suitable. If ‘task strategies’ are also regarded as a kind of mechanism by which goals work, then all these four points together could be very helpful for us to understand how ‘goals’ play their roles in a learner’s language learning process. In a sense, these mechanisms are related to learners’ ‘metacognitive knowledge’ as well (Wenden, 1998; Flavell, 1979, 1981). Specifically, what learners know about themselves and the tasks may determine how they are going to approach the task. Similarly, how learners set and value their goals may deeply affect their efforts and action plans. In this connection, it is important to think about how to interpret learners’ goal-relevant or goal-irrelevant actions and their corresponding strategies. Who should decide and judge the level of relevance and appropriateness seems to be a crucial question.

### **3.2.3.2 Goal prioritisation**

As a matter of fact, learners are unlikely to have only one goal in their heads when they pursue certain actions. Normally a complex set of goals may exist and function together in an interactive way (Dörnyei, 2000; Juvonen and Nishina, 1997; Wentzel, 1999). In a language classroom context, for example, a learner may not only have the goal of learning the target language, but also have other goals such as social interaction with the teacher and peers. Whatever the learners do in the classroom can be seen as a reflection of their various goals, even though some of their

goal-pursuing behaviours are driven by ‘non-conscious forces’ (Sorrentino, 1996, cited in Dörnyei, 2000: 531).

From a goal perspective, we can understand the concept of ‘tasks’ differently. In Winne and Marx’s (1989) words, ‘tasks are the events of classroom life that constitute opportunities for students to engage their cognitive and motivational apparatus in the service of achieving *personal* and *educational* goals’ (1989: 242). This definition indicates that learners will always bring their goals into their task choices, task perceptions, task evaluations, and on-task behaviours. Moreover, it implies that even in the language classroom, students should not only be treated as language learners who are supposed to work for educational goals, but also be treated as human beings who have diversified personal goals as well.

In view of the co-existence of multiple goals, it is interesting to know how they are analysed and prioritised by learners. In this regard, Dörnyei (2000) points out that ‘hardly any research has been done to examine how people deal with multiple actions and goals, how they prioritise between them and how the hierarchies of superordinate and subordinate goals are structured’ (2000: 530). To this question, a possible solution might be to fully explore the internal and external factors within a specific context, including the societal expectations, the class atmosphere, the teacher, the course, the learner’s previous learning experience, and the learner’s developmental



stage. Simply speaking, situational factors may influence learners' goals, which in turn may influence their motivations for tasks in particular and for learning in general.

### **3.3 Situational and task motivation at a micro level**

The above theories can all help explain learners' general language learning motivation at a macro level, which at the same time underpin further discussion of situational and task motivation at a micro level. In the following, I will talk about expectancy-value theory and the two comprehensive frameworks of L2 motivation respectively developed by Dörnyei (1994) and Williams and Burden (1997). Though the first theory does not focus on specific classroom tasks, it triggered my research design and I felt that one of its components (i.e. 'values') might be adapted into criteria for task evaluation in my context, hence the inclusion in this section. Regarding the two frameworks, despite their comprehensiveness, they both adopt a situated approach and therefore had much explanatory power in exploring motivational influences on learners exerted by various contextual factors.

#### **3.3.1 Expectancy-value theory**

Expectancy-value theory (Eccles and Wigfield, 1995; Wigfield, 1994; Wigfield and Eccles, 2000) is an important cognitive theory that informed my thinking and design about the present research. It has also been regarded as one of the long-standing perspectives on motivation. As Wigfield and Eccles (2000) says, 'theorists in this tradition argue that individuals' choice, persistence, and performance can be

explained by their beliefs about how well they will do on the activity and the extent to which they value the activity’ (2000: 68). This concise description clearly points out its key components—*expectancy for success* and *value*. I was very much intrigued by these two components and drew inspiration from them in developing my methodological framework (i.e. 3E Framework) which contains two similar elements—‘expectation’ and ‘evaluation’. In this subsection, I will talk about how this theory relates to my study, while noting similarities and differences between its components and my proposed elements.

#### **3.3.1.1 Expectancy for success**

‘Eccles et al. (1983) defined and measured *expectancies for success* as children’s beliefs about how they will do on upcoming tasks, either in the immediate or longer term future’ (Wigfield and Eccles, 2000: 70). In other words, the expectancies in this theory mainly focus on learners’ self-perceived abilities in the future. The concept of ‘tasks’ has very broad reference as well, referring to any of the school subjects such as mathematics or physics, rather than a specific classroom activity as I have discussed in chapter 2.

By contrast, the concept of ‘expectation’ in my proposed 3E framework is different and broader. It not only concerns students’ beliefs about their abilities in an achievement domain, but focuses more on their hopes or preferences about what kinds of specific activities they feel they would be motivated to do in class. Their

opinions in this regard would be collected and considered for the purpose of lesson planning and task writing. Further explanation regarding the sense of ‘expectation’ in the 3E framework will be discussed in the next chapter.

### 3.3.1.2 Values

Building on Atkinson’s (1957) original study on task value which was defined ‘in terms of the incentive value of anticipated success’ (Eccles and Wigfield, 1995: 216) as well as other theorists’ development on this conception, Eccles and her colleagues offered a broad definition of ‘*subjective task value*’ (Eccles [Parsons] et al., 1983). They discuss it from three aspects as follows which are assumed to influence the value that a person attaches to engaging in a task:

- i) the characteristics of the task itself,
- ii) the broader needs, goals, values, and motivational orientations of the individual,
- iii) the affective memories associated with similar tasks in the past.

(Eccles and Wigfield, 1995: 216)

Further, Eccles et al. (1983) proposed four major components of task value:

- i) *Attainment value*—the importance of doing well on a given task;
- ii) *Intrinsic value*—the enjoyment one gains from doing the task;
- iii) *Utility value or usefulness*—how a task fits into an individual’s future plans;
- iv) *Cost*—how the decision to engage in one activity limits access to other activities, assessments of how much effort will be taken to accomplish the activity, and emotional cost.

(Wigfield and Eccles, 2000: 72)

This classification of the four components is useful as it may help me analyse and interpret my students’ perceptions about task values. However, I would use it in an



opposite direction. That is, instead of measuring students' values attached to their *future* success on the *upcoming* tasks, I would like to use these components as criteria for them to evaluate their *completed* task-engagement experience *retrospectively*, in order to find out the underlying reasons why they felt some tasks could motivate and benefit them better than others.

### 3.3.2 Dörnyei's (1994) framework of L2 motivation

An earlier attempt to summarise L2 relevant motivational components was made by Dörnyei (1994), based on an empirical study conducted by Clément, Dörnyei and Noels (1994) in Hungary. A tripartite motivation construct was identified from this study, consisting of integrativeness, linguistic self-confidence, and the appraisal of the classroom environment. It further led to Dörnyei's (1994) general framework of L2 motivation which categorises an extensive list of motivational components into three main dimensions—the Language Level, the Learner Level, and the Learning Situation Level (see Table 3-2 next page).

<b>Language Level</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>♦ Integrative motivational subsystem</li> <li>♦ Instrumental motivational subsystem</li> </ul>
<b>Learner Level</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>♦ Need for achievement</li> <li>♦ Self-confidence                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Language use anxiety</li> <li>- Perceived L2 competence</li> <li>- Causal attributions</li> <li>- Self-efficacy</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
<b>Learning Situation Level</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>♦ <b>Course-specific motivational components</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Interest</li> <li>- Relevance</li> <li>- Expectancy</li> <li>- Satisfaction</li> </ul> </li> <li>♦ <b>Teacher-specific motivational components</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Affiliative motive</li> <li>- Authority type</li> <li>- Direct socialisation of motivation (Modelling, Task presentation, Feedback)</li> </ul> </li> <li>♦ <b>Group-specific motivational components</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Goal-orientedness</li> <li>- Norm and reward system</li> <li>- Group cohesion</li> <li>- Classroom goal structure</li> </ul> </li> </ul>

Table 3-2: Dörnyei’s (1994) general framework of L2 motivation

In general, the *language level* is mainly focused on general motivational orientations that are related to various aspects of the target language, which is in accordance with Gardner’s approach discussed above. The *learner level* is primarily concerned with relatively stable personality traits that are likely to affect an individual’s behaviour in every aspect of life, which is also an essential part of the trait/state approach. By contrast, the *learning situation level* plays a key part and is seen as the most

elaborate part of this framework. Therefore, my following discussion will focus on this level, in view of its potential contribution towards explaining my participants' situational and task motivation.

The classroom environment, which varies from one to another even within the same social and cultural context, contains various aspects which may have the most direct motivational impact on learners, because it is in this situation where most second and foreign languages are learned. Without a close study of the variables in different learning situations from a micro perspective, we will be unlikely to gain a comprehensive understanding of the motivational impact of the immediate learning context on learners and their possible motivational changes within that context. In this regard, Dörnyei (1994) outlines three motivational components that are specific to learning situations in his framework: 1) Course-specific motivational components; 2) Teacher-specific motivational components; and 3) Group-specific motivational components.

### **3.3.2.1 Course-specific motivational components**

This set of components is mainly concerned with 'the syllabus, the teaching materials, the teaching method and the learning tasks' (Dörnyei, 1994: 277), which seems like something connecting teachers with learners. If we liken the classroom learning process to a 'passage' or a 'channel', with teachers at one end and students at the other, then the above-mentioned things are what pass through this channel from one



end to the other. On the one hand, these components seem objective, because the syllabus and materials might not be selected by teachers or students in most situations. On the other hand, they are subjective as teachers may adjust and modify them aiming to make the course generate the most positive motivational impact on learners.

According to Dörnyei (1994), course-specific motivational components can be well described within the framework of four motivational conditions proposed by Keller (1983) and further highlighted by Crookes and Schmidt (1991). Based on Keller's (1983) education-oriented theory of motivation, Crookes and Schmidt (1991) explained clearly the four major determinants—interest, relevance, expectancy, and outcomes (for details, see 1991: 481-482). Simply speaking, *interest* is to arouse and sustain learners' curiosity; *relevance* means learners' personal needs or goals can be met in the course; *expectancy* refers to learners' expectation for success and attributions concerning success or failure; *outcomes* have now been extended as '*satisfaction*' which includes extrinsic rewards such as good marks as well as intrinsic rewards such as enjoyment (Dörnyei, 1994: 278).

From a teacher's perspective, bearing these four determinants in mind is certainly helpful not only for general course planning, but also for task writing and implementation. In addition to what I have discussed in the previous chapter, these four components can be seen as complementary criteria for designing motivating

tasks which are both linguistically and psychologically effective.

### 3.3.2.2 Teacher-specific motivational components

It is undoubted that teachers have a crucial part to play and have the most direct influence on learners in the classroom environment. Within this set of components, three motivational aspects of the teacher are discussed. The first one is '*affiliative drive*' which refers to students' need to do well in schools in order to please the teacher whom they like and appreciate' (Dörnyei, 1994: 278). In other words, if a subject is taught by a teacher whom a student appreciates, then he is likely to become more devoted to this subject. The second component is known as '*authority type*' (ibid), which reflects a teacher's personality and style, which in turn may lead to different kinds of classroom atmosphere, ranging from autonomy-supportive to teacher-controlled. Therefore, students' learning motivation might be positively or negatively influenced in different classrooms directed by different teachers. The third aspect is the teacher's *socialisation of student motivation*, i.e., 'whether he or she actively develops and stimulates learners' motivation' (ibid). As Dörnyei states, three main channels might serve this process: i) *Modelling*; ii) *Task presentation*; and iii) *Feedback*. In other words, students' attitudes and orientations towards learning will be developed or influenced by their teacher's way of acting as a model, of drawing attention to the interest and values of the activity, and of giving feedback on students' competence and performance.

### 3.3.2.3 Group-specific motivational components

This set of components mainly concerns the group dynamics that are relevant to L2 motivation. Dörnyei's (1994) discussion about them could be briefly summarised as follows: i) How group members unite and work towards their *group goal* in the light of their generally agreed *norm and reward system* has a strong influence on the individual learner's motivation; ii) Different classroom *goal structures* (competitive/cooperative/individualistic) may show different power in promoting learner's motivation.

In my target research context, the concept of 'group' might vary with different task situations. As my participants would be involved in individual work, pair work, group work, and whole-class work, while doing different tasks, it could be anticipated that their situation- and task-specific motivations would be affected by different others in different ways. To a learner, the 'group-specific' motivational factors may boil down to the influences of his peers as well as the interaction between them.

### 3.3.3 Williams and Burden's (1997) framework

Williams and Burden's (1997) framework is another comprehensive attempt to bring together different lines of motivation theories and group them into a more manageable system (see Table 3-3). Though claimed as 'cognitive and constructivist' (Williams and Burden, 1997: 137), their approach coincides with the common theme



emerging during the ‘cognitive-situated period’ in the 1990s (Dörnyei, 2005), as it takes various situational issues into account when looking at L2 motivation. In this subsection, I shall talk about some relevant factors in connection with the present research.

<b><u>Internal factors</u></b>	<b><u>External factors</u></b>
<b>1. Intrinsic interest of activity</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- arousal of curiosity</li><li>- optimal degree of challenge (zone of next potential)</li></ul>	<b>1. Significant others</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- parents</li><li>- teachers</li><li>- peers</li></ul>
<b>2. Perceived value of activity</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- personal relevance</li><li>- anticipated value of outcomes</li><li>- intrinsic value attributed to the activity</li></ul>	<b>2. The nature of interaction with significant others</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- mediated learning experience</li><li>- the nature and amount of feedback</li><li>- rewards</li><li>- the nature and amount of appropriate praise</li><li>- punishments, sanctions</li></ul>
<b>3. Sense of agency</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- locus of causality (origin vs. pawn)</li><li>- locus of control</li><li>- ability to set appropriate goals</li></ul>	<b>3. The learning environment</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- comfort</li><li>- resources</li><li>- time of day, week, year</li><li>- size of class and school</li><li>- class and school ethos</li></ul>
<b>4. Mastery</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- feelings of competence</li><li>- awareness of developing skill and mastery in a chosen area</li><li>- self-efficacy</li></ul>	<b>4. The broader context</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- wider family networks</li><li>- the local education system</li><li>- conflicting interests</li><li>- cultural norms</li><li>- social expectations and attitudes</li></ul>
<b>5. Self-concept</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- realistic awareness of personal strengths and weaknesses in skills required</li><li>- personal definitions and judgement of success and failure</li><li>- self-worth concern</li><li>- learned helplessness</li></ul>	
<b>6. Attitudes</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- to language learning in general</li><li>- to the target language</li><li>- to the target language community and culture</li></ul>	
<b>7. Other affective states</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- confidence</li><li>- anxiety, fear</li></ul>	
<b>8. Developmental age and stage</b>	
<b>9. Gender</b>	

Table 3-3: Williams and Burden’s (1997) framework of L2 motivation  
(1997: 138-139)

### 3.3.3.1 Internal factors

Before discussing the external contextual factors, it is necessary to touch upon the ‘internal attributes’ that individuals bring with them to whatever context (Williams and Burden, 1997: 137). The above list of ‘internal factors’ is very comprehensive, covering both ‘subjective’ and ‘objective’ aspects. Among them, the last two factors (i.e. developmental age and stage, and gender) are obviously objective because they are a kind of reality which is uninfluenced by any personal emotions. However, these objective facts may have great influence over learners by interacting with the other internal and external factors. Taking ‘developmental stage’ as an example, when learners are at secondary school or at university, their beliefs, values, and goals must be different, hence there is likely to be a difference in their perceived value of the activity, etc. Even within the university, students may have different beliefs due to their ever-changing learning needs and goals at different stages (e.g. the first year vs. the final year). Moreover, these differences have much to do with the various external factors as well, such as the societal expectation and the pressure imposed upon them.

As regards other internal factors (i.e. from No.1 to No.7 in Table 3-3), they seem to be ‘subjective’ in a sense, because these factors take place within people’s mind and can only be perceived by the people themselves, strictly speaking. In other words, it is the individual himself who, consciously or unconsciously, takes control of his own



emotional or psychological state, although these states could be reflected in the person's behaviours and therefore become observable.

With respect to the difference between the subjective internal factors, No.1 and 2 (i.e. 'intrinsic interest of activity' and 'perceived value of activity') seem to have a closer relationship with the 'activity' involved, whereas No.3-7 (i.e. 'sense of agency', 'mastery', 'self-concept', 'attitudes', and 'other affective states') are mainly concerned with the 'individuals' involved. Specifically speaking, the first two factors rely very much on the inherent qualities of a given task as has been discussed in Chapter 2. The task properties, such as the topic, the content, the purpose, and the participatory structure, may greatly influence learners' motivations in terms of whether the task can arouse their curiosity, provide challenge, and meet their personal goals. Meanwhile, these first two factors correspond to Deci and Ryan's (2002) notion of intrinsic motivation as well, implying that intrinsic motivation also exists in the interaction between the person and the task. Therefore, learners may perceive the value of the same task in different ways according to their different goals.

Regarding the rest of the internal factors (i.e. from No.3 to No.7), they all belong to the 'learners' beliefs about themselves' (Williams and Burden, 1997). Here I would like to mainly focus on factor No.3 and No.6 as I feel they are more relevant to the

present research. No.3 denotes ‘sense of agency’ which in Williams and Burden’s (1997) words refers to ‘the sense people have of whether they cause and are in control of their actions, or whether they perceive that what happens to them is controlled by other people’ (1997: 127). To link this concept with Self-determination theory (Deci and Ryan, 1985; 2002), it seems that people’s sense of agency is directly related with the various types of regulation and the level of autonomy involved. The more sense of agency people have, the more self-determined they are likely to be and the more autonomy can be expected. Therefore, a stronger sense of agency is closer to the ‘intrinsic motivation’ end of the self-determination continuum. On the contrary, if people perceive that their behaviours are controlled by others, especially when the control is related to pressure or punishment, their motivation will be negatively directed towards the ‘amotivation’ end of the continuum. Even if the control is rewarding, people’s motivation might as well be diminished due the lack of ‘feelings of personal responsibility and freedom of choice’ (Williams and Burden, 1997: 128).

In addition, ‘ability to set appropriate goals’ is a very important part of ‘sense of agency’ (ibid). This is evident because goals may lead a person to make decisions and motivate him to carry them out with required efforts. In this aspect, there is a key point to note, that is, who judges whether a goal is ‘appropriate’ or not. In the classroom context, a goal might be set by the learner himself which does not sound appropriate to others such as his teachers or parents. On the other hand, a learner’s

goal might be set by others but unfortunately does not positively motivate the learner at all; hence he may just seek excuses for not working towards the given goal. In whatever case, educators or researchers should take into account the individual learner's situation, and avoid imposing goals on learners rigidly or encouraging learners' own goals blindly. Perhaps according to learners' different ages and developmental stages, teachers may give different amounts of freedom to learners and work with them to set appropriate goals.

Another internal factor 'attitudes' draws my attention as well. This is not a new concept and much has been talked about it from the early social educational model to the current motivation theories of various kinds. Regarding the three bullet points listed under 'attitudes' (see Table 3-3), it is worth thinking about whether a learner has exactly the same kind of attitude towards these three aspects—'language learning in general', 'the target language', and 'the target language community and culture'. A learner may be very interested in a different culture, but this does not necessarily mean that he wants to learn the relevant language, since his needs may be easily satisfied through his native language. A learner may have a relatively stable attitude to the target language, but his attitude to the language learning process is ever changing due to the change of the learning stages and situations. To understand these issues, it is necessary to take the external factors into consideration. Only when an individual and his internal attributes are seen in a specific context, can we understand his motivation more fully and correctly.



### **3.3.3.2 External factors**

Williams and Burden (1997) list four groups of external factors (see Table 3-3). The first two groups are ‘people factors’, while the last two are ‘contextual factors’. As regards people factors, ‘parents, teachers, and peers’ are the most significant people surrounding the learners and therefore have the most direct influence on their language learning motivation. In this regard, parents’ influence might get weaker as the learners grow up, especially in the case of adult learners (such as university students) living far away from home. Even so, they still exert implicit or explicit influence on learners, and therefore learners’ learning goals are very likely to bear certain family expectation. This is particularly true in Chinese and other Asian societies, as a student’s academic success is often seen ‘as a source of pride for the entire family unit’ (Kember, 2000: 115; cf. Salili, 1996). As Kember (2000) further states, ‘...there is often a willingness for family or extended family members to contribute to educational cost. This no doubt puts pressure upon those benefiting these investments to work hard and succeed with their studies’ (2000: 116).

Teachers and peers stay with the learners most of the time during their learning history, and therefore may affect learners’ motivations more frequently and deeply. Issues in this regard have been discussed in 3.3.2.2 and 3.3.2.3 within Dörnyei’s (1994) framework, and therefore I am not going to repeat the discussion here.

Learners can indeed play an active part in the interaction between ‘significant others’ and themselves. However, they may not be equally powerful when confronted with the two groups of ‘contextual factors’ (i.e. ‘the learning environment’ and ‘the broader context’, see Table 3-3). As an individual unit within a society, a learner may have little or no power to choose a ‘context’ to stay in: he cannot choose his ‘wider family networks’ in a family; he cannot choose the ‘size of class’ or the ‘school ethos’ in an educational setting; and he cannot choose the ‘local educational system’ or the ‘cultural norms’ in a community. In another sense, however, learners do have important roles to play in this seemingly one-way relationship. That is, they may understand and interpret the various contextual factors in different ways, according to their own learning interests, capacities, goals and attitudes.

To summarise, internal factors interact with external factors in a dynamic way; at the same time, internal influences and external influences interact among themselves as well (Williams and Burden, 1997). In terms of task motivation studies, researchers should not only be concerned with the learners’ innate needs, but also take into account the broader contextual factors as well as more specific situational and task-dependent factors.

### **3.4 A process-oriented approach to task motivation**

Also in the 1990s when cognitive-situated approaches became more widely adopted, another neglected aspect—the ‘temporal variation’ of motivation—started to draw

researchers' attention (Dörnyei, 2003: 17). Dörnyei (2001) points out 'the challenge of time' in motivation research, by summarising that motivation is a dynamic entity which evolves through complex mental process and changes over time. This issue was initially addressed by German psychologists Heckhausen and Kuhl (e.g. Heckhausen and Kuhl, 1985; Kuhl, 1987; Heckhausen, 1991; Kuhl and Beckmann, 1994). Though they were not L2 motivation researchers, their theory of motivational process, known as 'Action Control Theory', has greatly inspired some further research on analysing and identifying the dynamic nature of L2 motivation (e.g. Williams and Burden, 1997; Ushioda, 1996, 1998; Dörnyei and Ottó, 1998). Task motivation is an important research direction in this vein. As I stated at the beginning of this chapter, Dörnyei (2002; Kormos and Dörnyei, 2004) has suggested the relevance of a process-oriented approach to task motivation research, in addition to the traditional trait/state one.

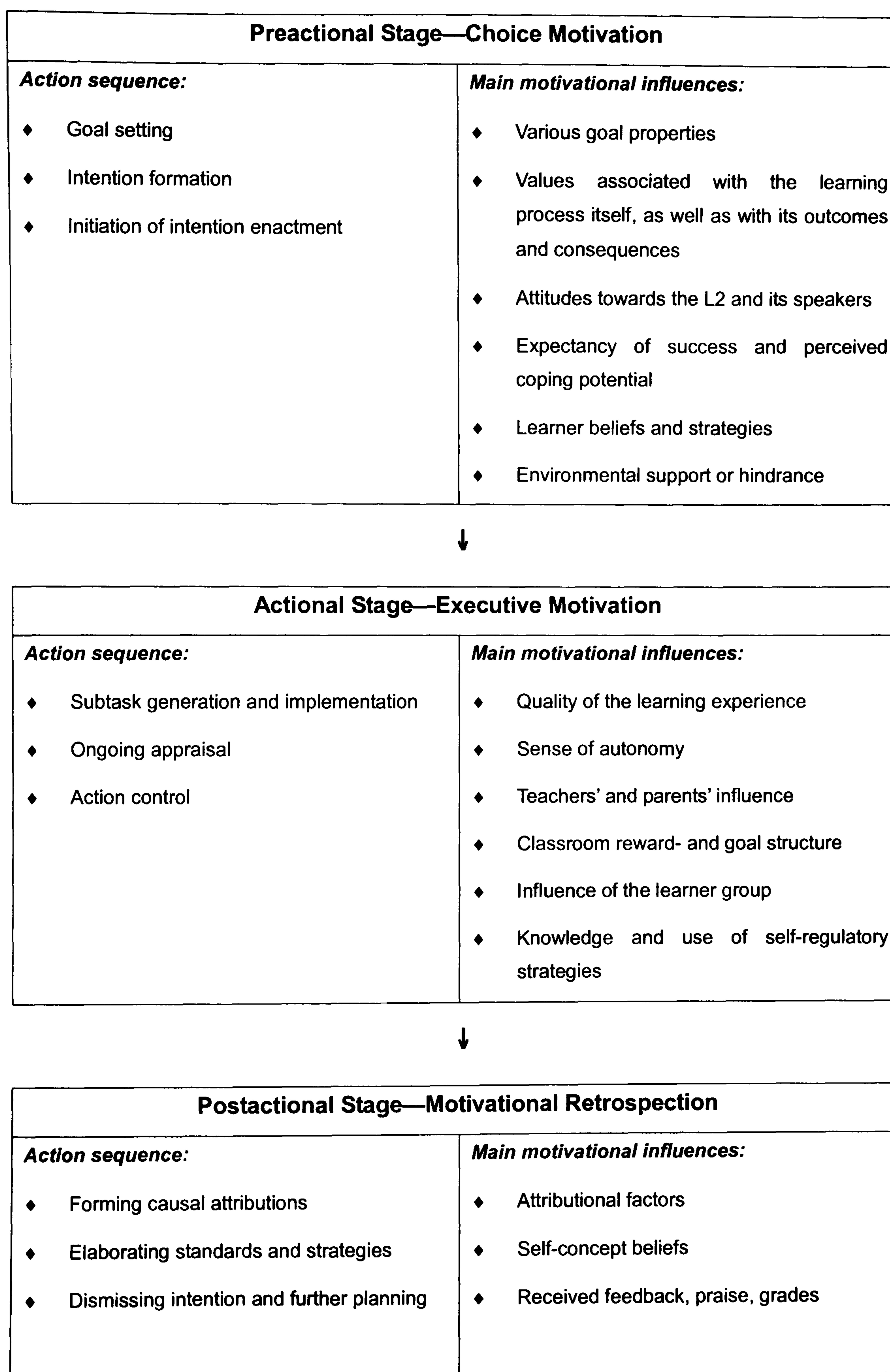
### **3.4.1 Dörnyei and Ottó's (1998) process model**

This subsection focuses on Dörnyei and Ottó's (1998) process model of L2 motivation, as it triggered the methodological design for my study into task motivation that I have briefly introduced in the first chapter (i.e. 3E Framework, see 1.2.3). The model not only represents the process-oriented approach that has been developed since the late 1990s, but also attempts to 'synthesise a number of different lines of research in a unified framework' (Dörnyei, 2001: 85). Figure 3-1 presents its basic structure and key components at the three stages—preactional stage, actional



stage, and postactional stage, involving two dimensions: *action sequence* and *motivational influences*. As Dörnyei (2001) summarises:

‘The first dimension represents the behavioural process whereby initial wishes, hopes, and desires are first transformed into goals, then into intentions, leading eventually to action and, hopefully, to the accomplishment of the goals, after which the process is submitted to final evaluation. The second dimension...includes the energy sources and motivational forces that underlie and fuel the behavioural process’ (2001: 85).



*Figure 3-1: Process model of L2 motivation*  
*(A simplified version based on Dörnyei and Ottó, 1998; Dörnyei, 2003)*

### 3.4.1.1 Preactional phase

The preactional phase can be distinguished into three sub-processes—*goal setting*, *intention formation*, and the *initiation of intention enactment*. These three sub-phases are closely interlinked and the relevant motivational influences are assumed to have a cumulative effect, i.e., the influences that support the first sub-phase will continue to work to a certain extent in the second and third ones.

#### 3.4.1.1.1 Goal setting

At the very starting point, a person might have multiple wishes/hopes/desires to do something, but not all these wishes will come into force eventually. Some of them might be unrealistic or unmanageable thus remaining as daydreams; while others would possibly be fulfilled in the long run. Only those that are transformed into reality-orientated goals may be seen as ‘the engine to fire an action and provide the direction in which to act’ (Dörnyei and Ottó, 1998: 49, based on Locke and Latham’s *goal-setting theory*, 1994). It is at this point that a behavioral process begins. With regard to the relevant motivational influences at this level, there are both internal and external factors involved. From an internal perspective, the factors include the learners’ beliefs related to their past experiences, the anticipated values of the outcome, the personal feelings about the L2 and L2 learning, and so on. From an external perspective, on the other hand, the learning situation and school culture, etc. should be taken into account as well.



#### 3.4.1.1.2 Intention formation

After a goal is set, no matter whether it is selected voluntarily by the learner, or assigned externally by significant others, two other steps will be very crucial in this phase in order for the goal to be actually acted out, that is, to make *commitment* to the goal and to develop a manageable *action plan*. Only under these two conditions can a qualitative change take place ‘in one’s goal-related attitudes’ (ibid). It is at this moment that a fully operational intention can be generated out of the goal-setting in the first phase. In speaking of the motivational influences at this phase, various complicated factors are included (not only the influences from outside such as the external demands and requirements, but also the factors from within such as the learner’s need for achievement and fear of failure) which will serve the formation of intention.

#### 3.4.1.1.3 Initiation of intention enactment

In this phase, the process model suggests two necessary conditions in order for the intention to be fulfilled, that is, the *availability of means and resources* necessary for actualising the intention to act; and the *start condition* which is generally concerned with the suitable opportunities and the appropriate preparation. Likewise, there are a few motivational variables affecting the enactment of an intention, including the positive beliefs about one’s sufficient control over the outcome, and some negative forces such as the distracting influences and the perceived difficulties which might impede the implementation. In addition, Dörnyei and Ottó (1998) particularly point

out another powerful factor which may potentially make one think again before one is inclined to abandon the enactment of an intention. that is, the '*perceived consequences for not acting*' (1998: 57).

Generally speaking, the above three sub-phases can be grouped together and the related motivational dimension 'can be referred to as *choice motivation*, because the generated motivation leads to the selection of the goal or task that the individual will pursue' (Dörnyei, 2003: 18). Following that, the individual has started his action and now it is the implementation of action that has been put into focus. In Heckhausen's (1991) words, 'choice motivation' is replaced by '*executive motivation*' in the actional phase (1991: 170).

#### **3.4.1.2 Actional phase**

During the course of an action, a series of *subtasks* are generated and the accompanying sub-goals are set concerning the effective learning as a whole. In the meantime, the learner's ongoing *appraisal* process is working as one is continuously evaluating the physical and psychological learning contexts (e.g., language classroom) around him, which in turn is affecting his attitudes and motivation towards his learning behaviour. Furthermore, in order for the established intention and ongoing action to be protected and not to be distracted by any other personal and/or environmental factors, another psychological control process must come into force, that is, in Kuhl's words, '*Action Control*' (Kuhl, 1994; Como, 1993; Dörnyei

and Ottó, 1998). With regard to the ‘executive motivational influences’ in the actional process, most of them are associated with the appraisal system, concerning a number of factors such as the course, the teacher, the peers, the outcome, as well as other possible external sources of situation-specific motivation. Meanwhile, emphases are also put on certain factors which may have weakening effect (e.g., natural tendency to get tired of the activity) and other positive sources which can enhance motivation (e.g., action maintenance strategies).

### **3.4.1.3 Postactional phase**

This is the final stage in an entire cycle, but at this moment the goal should have been attained or the action terminated. During this phase, what the learner is doing is ‘evaluating the accomplished action outcome and contemplating possible inferences to be drawn for future actions’ (Dörnyei and Ottó, 1998: 51). Simply speaking, the learner is looking back on his past and forward to his future. This critical retrospection is of great significance in that it may help the learner to accumulate the experience and to prepare the ground for the future action. Similar to the first four phases, there are a few motivational influences that are active in this phase. They mainly include some internal factors such as how the learner attributes his past success or failure and how he shapes his self-beliefs (e.g., self-confidence or self-competence), as well as some external evaluation cues such as the feedback received from significant others.



All in all, Dörnyei and Ottó's (1998) process model is one of the most promising motivation theories in recent years with its emphasis on 'portraying motivational processes as they happen in time' (Dörnyei, 2000: 519). By pointing out that most past research has just considered motivation as a relatively stable emotional or mental state, Dörnyei (2000) stresses that 'a process-oriented model of motivation should be able to account for both the generation and further development of motivation' (2000: 524). It helps the researcher to be more aware of 'the benefits of looking at motivation as being associated with a process that can account for the dynamic evolution of motivation and which can also fully accommodate the learner's and the teacher's active role in controlling and shaping the affective foundation of the learning process' (2000: 536).

However, there still exists one point in this model which seems a bit controversial to me, that is, how to identify a 'process'. Since a learning process could be as long as ten years or more (e.g., mastering a second/foreign language), or as short as just a few minutes (e.g., doing a specific task in class), how can we specify when a 'process' begins and ends, and how long a complete 'learning process' is? From my point of view, the so-called 'process' is rather a vague and general term which might not have a clear-cut or concrete definition. Therefore, it is important to think about a key question, that is, to what extent can the 'process model' be applied appropriately to the significantly different processes that different empirical studies may focus on.

### 3.4.2 A specific task-engagement process

It can be seen that when Dörnyei suggests a process-oriented approach to task motivation studies, he usually considers a particular task (e.g. Dörnyei, 2002). In other words, he looks into a specific task-engagement process in his research. On this basis, Dörnyei (2003, 2005) proposes a ‘task processing system’ to explain the ‘dynamic interface between motivational attributes and specific language behaviours (2005: 81). He introduces three interrelated mechanisms—*task execution*, *appraisal*, and *action control*—respectively referring to learners’ ‘engagement in task-supportive learning behaviours’, their ‘continuous processing of the stimuli’, as well as how they save or enhance learning-specific action through motivational self-regulation (Dörnyei, 2003: 15-16).

This processing system supports the study of task motivation at a micro level and may complement the task-based research in SLA. In the linguistics area, researchers mainly focus on the inherent task features and learners’ task performance; while the psychologists’ research efforts may help explain how learners’ task performances are influenced by their affective and motivational thinking. However, as I indicated earlier, engaging in a task is not an isolated experience which takes place in a context-free environment. Rather, it is ‘the composite outcome of a number of distinct motivational influences, many of which are related to the various broader contexts each task is surrounded with’ (Dörnyei, 2002: 138).

### 3.4.3 An extended task-engagement process

To take the ‘broader contexts’ into account may require us to look at an extended task-engagement process, so as to have a macro understanding of what learners bring with them to the task and what they can ‘take away’ from the task after doing it. In my study, listening to the participants’ voices on these aspects would certainly help me understand their motivations for tasks. Meanwhile, it was anticipated that their voices would reflect both general motivational orientations that might have been deeply rooted in their minds, and their temporary feelings and reactions prompted by the specific tasks.

As I explained in the first chapter, I decided to choose an academic term (i.e. September 2004—January 2005) to conduct my fieldwork. This would be identified as a teaching/learning ‘process’ comprising a number of specific task-engagement sub-processes. That is to say, in my research context, the *task-engagement process* would refer to an extended process of engaging in a number of specific tasks. Apart from looking at my participants’ responses to individual tasks, I would also put all these sub-processes together and see them as a whole, aiming to find out the major sources of their motivations for tasks within this context.

## 3.5 Conclusion

This chapter is the second part of the literature review, focusing on the relevant literature in the field of psychology. Together with the previous chapter, it aims to



establish a theoretical basis for this task motivation research. The chapter began with a comprehensive review of the complex concept of task motivation and the existing approaches to research in this area. It then reviewed relevant motivation theories/frameworks/models in detail, respectively from the macro, micro, and process-oriented perspectives. In general, Chapter 2 and 3 are mainly devoted to the theoretical issues related to the present research. In the following chapter, I am going to talk about some methodological issues regarding the study of task motivation.

## **Chapter 4 Literature Review—Methodological Issues**

### **4.0 Introduction**

This chapter is the third part of the literature review, focusing on methodological issues in connection with the study of task motivation. The first section is an overview of methodological changes in motivation research, with an emphasis on the qualitative approach which is the one that the present research adopts. The second section critiques a few key studies of task motivation. The third section makes a suggestion for ‘balanced research’ by integrating the principles of ‘Exploratory Practice’ (Allwright, 2003) into studies of motivation. The concluding section explains the 3E framework that I propose for this research.

### **4.1 Methodological changes in motivation research**

The main research traditions followed by L2 motivation researchers in the past four decades have employed a quantitative approach, in the light of the ‘social-psychological agenda’ established by Gardner and Lambert and their associates (Skehan, 1989: 6). Since the 1990s, the motivation field has seen a ‘revolution’ which greatly promoted the development and changes not only in the theoretical but also in the methodological aspects of L2 motivation research. A descriptive/interpretive approach adopting qualitative methods has stepped onto the stage and started to draw people’s attention. Despite the limited number of qualitative

studies so far, it has been widely agreed that this research approach could act as a good complement of the long-standing quantitative tradition of motivation research (Ushioda, 1994).

It should be noted that the quantitative/qualitative distinction is not simply a matter of methodology. As Ushioda (2001) says, these two research approaches are defined by the nature of their different ‘theoretical focus and empirical purpose’ (2001: 96). In other words, they represent different concepts of motivation. In this regard, Ushioda (2001: 96-97) has discussed in detail the distinction between these two concepts based on Ames’ (1986) work. Specifically speaking:

‘As a quantitative variable, motivation may be equated with a conceptualisation of measurable activity that involves energy and persistence, such as how much effort students put into their learning, how long they persevere at a task, how active they are, or how strong their level of arousal for learning seems to be.’

‘As a qualitative variable, on the other hand, motivation may be defined not in terms of observable and measurable activity, but rather in terms of what patterns of thinking and belief underlie such activity and shape students’ engagement in the learning process.’

(Ushioda, 2001: 96)

The above statements imply that the quantitative concept of motivation is more closely connected with the behaviour-level activity, and the qualitative concept of motivation with the underlying thinking-level activity. This distinction may further point to the significance and necessity of employing qualitative research methods, in view of the fact that the seemingly similar behaviours may be driven by different patterns of thinking. Certainly, this is by no means to underrate the considerable



contributions made by quantitative motivation research. In the following subsections, I will further talk about these two approaches respectively, with the emphasis put on the qualitative one where my current research is positioned.

#### **4.1.1 Quantitative approach**

In the quantitative research paradigm, there has been a substantial amount of research attempting to identify and classify the motivational components, to measure the relationship between motivation and achievement or other individual difference variables, and to analyse the role of motivation in the theoretical models of language learning (Ushioda, 2001). As Dörnyei (2001) summarises, there are mainly four types of motivational studies taking this approach—‘survey studies, factor analytical studies, correlational studies, and studies using structural equation modelling’ (2001: 215). Basically, all these four categories involve statistical analyses of motivational components. That is to say, conclusions and implications are mainly drawn from the researchers’ analyses and interpretations of numerical data.

#### **4.1.2 Qualitative approach**

Motivation is an ‘intricate and multilevel construct’ (Dörnyei, 2001: 239), and its dynamic nature may not be able to be fully explored by the quantitative studies only. With an ‘open-ended and exploratory character’ (Dörnyei, 2001: 40), the qualitative approach to the study of L2 motivation has started to show its potential. It is claimed that its purpose is ‘to analyse and explore aspects of motivation that are not easily accommodated within the dominant research paradigm’ (Ushioda, 2001: 97). As

Dörnyei (2001) further states:

‘In contrast to the quantitative tradition, whose strength lies in detecting general trends across learners, this line of investigation is more appropriate to uncover the complex interaction of social, cultural and psychological factors within the individual learner.’

(Dörnyei, 2001: 240)

Undoubtedly, uncovering ‘the complex interaction’ may help understand learners’ choices, goals, and quality of their involvement in learning. Moreover, the research methods involved in a qualitative approach are mainly ‘interview studies’ and ‘case studies’ (Dörnyei, 2001: 238) which are necessarily concerned with individual learners within particular contexts. Such a focus coincides with the increasing need for situated studies of motivation as well.

This is the basic research agenda that my study of task motivation falls within: to explore the qualitative content of university students’ motivational thought patterns which may affect their perceptions of motivating task features in particular and shape their engagement in language learning in general.

#### **4.1.3 Representative qualitative studies**

Despite growing awareness of the importance of the qualitative approach, there are so far only a limited number of motivation research studies adopting this method. But it is generally believed that their preliminary achievements will attract more interested researchers working along this fruitful direction. In this section, I am going to briefly talk about four representative qualitative studies of motivation which

together triggered my interest to explore the present topic in this vein.

#### **4.1.3.1 Ushioda (1996, 2001)**

‘Ushioda has been one of the few to advocate qualitative approaches to the study of L2 motivation’ (Dörnyei, 2001: 239). Ushioda (2001) reports in detail on a small-scale empirical study conducted in early 1990s. She interviewed 20 college students who took French studies in Ireland in the first round; and again interviewed 16 of them in the follow-up round over a year later, from which substantial open-ended qualitative type of data was elicited. The data was content analysed, aiming to explore ‘(a) learners’ own working conceptions of their motivation, and (b) their perspectives in relation to aspects of motivational evolution and experience over time’ (Ushioda, 2001: 93).

#### **4.1.3.2 Williams and Burden (1999)**

Williams and Burden (1999) describe a preliminary investigation into the development of students’ attributions for success and failure in learning French in British secondary schools. This qualitative study involved individual interviews with 36 students selected from 3 schools, aged from 10 to 15 years old. Data elicited was content analysed following the principles of a grounded approach, so as to allow themes to emerge from the data rather than ‘approaching the data with any predetermined categories’ (1999: 196).



#### **4.1.3.3 Williams, Burden and Al-Baharna (2001)**

Following up the previous attribution research, Williams, Burden and Al-Baharna (2001) report on another study which ‘further aims to explore the reasons given by students for their perceived success and failure, and to compare these with reasons given by teachers for their students’ successes and failures’ (2001: 175). This study was conducted within an Islamic culture, involving 29 secondary teachers of English and 25 students learning English as a subject in five different secondary schools. Data were partly collected from teachers by means of open questionnaires, and partly collected from students by means of individual interviews. Both qualitative and quantitative methods were used, with the former being the main one. Compared with the research context of the previous study (i.e. Williams and Burden, 1999), this one indicates that ‘cultural dimension’ might be a ‘potentially powerful contributing factor’ (Williams, et al, 2001: 174).

#### **4.1.3.4 Shoaib and Dörnyei (2005)**

Shoaib and Dörnyei’s (2005) recent study of motivation adopted a qualitative research approach involving 25 interviews with 15 female and 10 male participants of mixed nationalities, aged from 18 to 34, all of whom were non-native learners of English. This study concerned ‘the temporal progression of student motivation’, aiming to ‘identify and document different motivational influences and various temporal patterns in language learning’ over a longer period within the life span (Shoaib and Dörnyei, 2005: 22). Different from the previous three studies introduced

above, the data collected in this study were analysed according to a qualitative ‘template approach’ (ibid; Miles and Huberman, 1984, 1994; Crabtree and Miller, 1992). That is to say, a template of relevant codes was prepared first, and was then applied to the actual data for the purpose of analysis. In this way, data interpretation could be based on an explicit form displayed after ‘systematically reducing the data’ (Shoaib and Dörnyei, 2005: 28).

Generally speaking, despite the limited number, the above four qualitative studies have already covered different areas of motivation research. They touched upon different theoretical focuses—motivational change/evolution, attribution theory and temporal motivational progression. They involved participants of different backgrounds—Irish college students learning French, British learners of French in secondary schools, Bahraini secondary teachers and learners of English, as well as non-native learners of English from European, Asian and Middle Eastern countries. They also used different methods of data collection/analysis—interviews, open questionnaires, the grounded theory approach and the template approach. More importantly, the findings and implications drawn from these studies are very useful and fruitful, which further shows the richness of qualitative data and the significance of this method.

All these achievements greatly aroused my interest. Meanwhile, I noticed that none

of the above four studies was based on classrooms, and none of the researchers/interviewers had continuously close contact with their participants over an extended period of time as an ‘insider’. On the one hand, such an identity may minimize ‘the face-threatening potential of the interview situation as perceived by the subjects’ (Ushioda, 2001: 99). On the other hand, however, the invisible distance between researchers and participants plus the isolation of the interview situation from the actual classroom learning contexts might affect the richness of the data as well. Therefore, I decided to position my research as classroom-based teacher research in which I would perform dual roles (i.e. teacher and researcher) working closely with a group of students for some quality time. It was hoped that my personal involvement would shed some light on the understanding of L2 motivation.

## **4.2 Critiquing key studies of task motivation**

The above discussion about quantitative/qualitative approaches to motivation research sets up a basic research agenda for my current study. To make it more focused, I shall now turn to talk about some key studies which are more directly relevant to my research topic—task motivation. ‘Language learning tasks’ is a widely researched topic in SLA. However, ‘task motivation’ is a relatively new research direction in the field of L2 motivation. There are so far only a limited number of studies devoted to this topic. Some of the key studies are: Julkunen (1989; 2001); Dörnyei and Kormos (2000); Dörnyei (2002); Kormos and Dörnyei (2004). Among this list, the last three are the most recent empirical studies into task motivation.



Moreover, they were conducted in similar contexts following a similar research design, and therefore might be regarded as a series of studies along the same line. Therefore, I am going to consider them as a whole and take the last one (ie. Kormos and Dörnyei, 2004) as the main example to discuss what they have achieved and what could be supplemented in future research. More importantly, I will discuss how and why my study of this topic may be different from it in terms of theoretical focus and methodological design.

#### **4.2.1 Studies by Dörnyei and Kormos**

In their first data-based study, Dörnyei and Kormos (2000) explored ‘various *affective* (primarily motivational) and *socio-dynamic* variables underlying student *performance* in communicative language tasks’ (2000: 280-281). Following it up, Dörnyei (2002) examined how ‘the dynamic interplay of the task participants’ motivation’ might influence their performance in the same kind of task (2002: 144). The most recent study by Kormos and Dörnyei (2004) further investigated ‘the role of motivation and some other related individual difference variables’ in task performance (2004: 16). This study is more complicated and comprehensive in that it ‘added five language variables that measure the *quality* of students’ output’; whereas the previous two studies only concerned the *quantity* of the speech produced (ibid).

##### **4.2.1.1 Concept of task engagement**

It can be seen that one of the central focuses throughout the three studies is learners’

‘performance’. In this regard, a series of language variables were measured, such as the size of speech, the number of turns, accuracy and complexity. All of these were taken as ‘an index of the learners’ task engagement’ (Dörnyei, 2002: 144). While agreeing that it is reasonable to interpret ‘task engagement’ in terms of these variables, I have certain reservations about whether this is a comprehensive way of looking into it. It seems that what can be measured by this means is just observable behaviour-level engagement but not the underlying thinking-level engagement. In this case, the researchers seem to consider only their participants’ ‘language learner’ or ‘task taker’ identities at a specific time from a micro perspective. However, when looking at the broader contexts beyond the task situation and the language classroom, we should be aware that learners are first of all human beings in the real world who may have various personal goals and needs apart from learning the target language or completing a given task. In this sense, ‘task engagement’ may be understood from a human development perspective as well. For example, when doing a task, some students may engage in active thinking rather than speaking. Similarly, other students may engage in listening to their fellow participants rather than practising their own language. Though learners’ mental activity of this kind may not be easily observed or measured as their language output, this aspect should not be left out when we interpret their engagement in tasks. One possible solution might be to try to listen to learners’ own voices about how they think about a task in addition to observing their behaviours.

#### **4.2.1.2 Situation-specific factors**

Within the three studies, a set of motivational and individual difference variables were measured: 1) integrativeness, 2) incentive values of English proficiency, 3) attitudes towards the English course, 4) linguistic self-confidence, 5) language use anxiety, 6) task attitudes, and 7) willingness to communicate. The list shows that most of the variables are related to learners' general motivational disposition, with only 'course attitudes' and 'task attitudes' being more situation-specific. Since taking 'tasks' as the research basis falls within the 'situated' approach, it would be necessary to include more contextual factors into the research in order to obtain a comprehensive picture of task motivation. As Dörnyei (2005) himself points out, 'on-task behaviour is embedded in a series of actional contexts, each of which exert a certain amount of unique motivational influence' (2005: 81).

Therefore, it would be interesting to explore how more specific 'actional contexts' might influence learners' task motivation, such as what kind of English course it was, how learners liked or disliked the teacher who taught that course, whether learners had any short-term or long-term goals in mind when they were at a certain developmental stage, whether they previously had any happy or unhappy experiences that affected their attitudes towards the course or the task, and whether there was anything unusual that influenced their performance when they were asked to do the task at a certain time of the day. It seems reasonable to intuit that all these factors can



exert some influences, and the degree of these influences may vary among different learners in view of their different learning history, personalities, learning styles, and so on.

#### **4.2.1.3 Research methodology**

The possibly insufficient concern about the above two aspects (i.e. ‘concept of task engagement’ and ‘situation-specific factors’) might be due to the methodology employed in these three studies. Having all followed a quantitative approach, these studies were not designed to explore learners’ underlying thinking patterns through in-depth data. In addition, in all three studies, only one particular task was used for the research purpose. Learners’ task performance observed during a ‘one-off’ experience may not be able to fully reflect their underlying motivations. Though the task was carried out during the students’ regular English classes, somehow this particular class seemed different from their normal learning experience. We could hardly know how students would perform if the class was not recorded; and what the result would be if a different task was used. Therefore, further studies might be needed involving different research contexts, especially more natural learning situations.

Regarding the motivational variables measured in these studies, it might be interesting to explore them with a more open mind. That is to say, instead of using a closed questionnaire made up of predetermined items, open-ended questions and

other qualitative methods might be added as well. Very likely, some unexpected issues may come up providing a richer picture of learners' task motivation.

### **4.3 Integrating 'Exploratory Practice' (EP) into motivation research<sup>2</sup>**

From this section, I shall turn to discuss my proposed research approach and the rationale for the methodological design of the present study. Generally speaking, my research falls within the qualitative research paradigm. To be more specific, I would regard my empirical study as a type of practitioner research, with me working as a teacher researcher in the authentic classroom for an extended period of time. In addition to adopting the commonly used qualitative research methods, I am also going to borrow the principles of Exploratory Practice (EP) which are rarely mentioned in the motivation literature. At this point, it is necessary to explain that I did not discuss the general practitioner literature in the previous two chapters because my awareness of the nature of the present research has been developed in the actual research process, especially after I immersed myself in the actual classroom situation. Initially I simply wanted to target my research in the classroom. It was later upon reflection that I gradually realised the key role a teacher researcher might have played in classroom-based research. In the course of developing this awareness, the EP principles that I am going to discuss in the following contributed a lot to my understanding.

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<sup>2</sup> This section is adapted from Li, 2006.

### 4.3.1 Understanding EP principles

Exploratory Practice, as ‘a set of ideas about practices for language teaching (and learning) research’, and as ‘a set of principles’ for practitioner research, has been developed and elaborated by Dick Allwright for more than ten years since the 1990s (Allwright, 2003: 109). Its basic principles have been formulated as follows:

*Principle 1: put ‘quality of life’ first.*

*Principle 2: work primarily to understand language classroom life.*

*Principle 3: involve everybody.*

*Principle 4: work to bring people together.*

*Principle 5: work also for mutual development.*

*Principle 6: integrate the work for understanding into classroom practice.*

*Principle 7: make the work a continuous enterprise.*

(Allwright, 2003: 128-130)

Initially when I read these principles I did not see them as particularly relevant to my own research. However, as I got more involved in the extensive reading of motivation literature, I gradually found with surprise that the developmental history of motivation research has, explicitly or implicitly, shared certain underlying principles of EP.

As I mentioned in previous chapters, since the 1990s, research in the area of motivation has undergone a kind of ‘renaissance’ (Gardner and Tremblay, 1994) with a large number of studies ‘reopening the research agenda’ (Crookes and Schmidt, 1991), shifting the focus from the social psychological approach to a more educational focus ‘looking at classroom reality, and identifying and analysing classroom-specific motives’ (Dörnyei, 1998: 125). This recognition of the



importance of the immediate classroom environment in influencing student motivation corresponds very well to the key claim of Exploratory Practice—understanding the ‘quality of classroom life’ (Allwright, 2003). The call for a situated approach in both areas can be found in different publications appearing at the same time. Crookes and Schmidt’s (1991) influential article has been seen as a turning point in motivation research as it brought out explicitly ‘the desire to narrow down the macro perspective of L2 motivation...to a more fine-tuned and situated analysis of motivation as it operates in actual learning situations...’ (Dörnyei, 2005: 74). And in 1991, Allwright for the first time formulated the academic origins of EP, with its first principle being that ‘research should aim at the development of situational understanding’ (cited in Allwright, 2003: 116).

Secondly, the EP principles, especially Number 6 and 7, indicate that practitioner research attaches great importance to the ‘process’ of working for understanding in the classroom practice. This emphasis coincides with the increased awareness of the appropriateness of the ‘process-oriented approach’ (Dörnyei and Ottó, 1998; Dörnyei, 2003) to motivation research as well. Since ‘learners tend to demonstrate a fluctuating level of commitment even within a single lesson, and the variation in their motivation over a longer period can be dramatic’ (Dörnyei, 2003: 17), researchers in this field have started to look at the ongoing changes of motivation in addition to its stable characteristics.

### 4.3.2 A plea for ‘balanced research’

With this awareness, I decided to focus my motivation research on a particular and authentic classroom context for a whole academic term, hoping to understand how students’ task motivations might be influenced by various factors over time on the one hand, and meanwhile to explore the complexity of classroom life by investigating students’ motives underlying their various learning behaviours on the other. During this research, I myself would play dual roles so as to explore teaching and my research from both practical and theoretical perspectives.

However, ‘this endeavour to combine two roles into a new one is flying in the face of the demands for continued specialisation in order to keep abreast with all the changes in each profession’ (Jarvis, 1999: 9). It implies that neither teaching nor research ever proceeds exactly according to plan and that both roles demand a degree of fluidity. Just as the notion of a ‘*balanced lesson*’ that Van Lier (1996) explains, a lesson contains ‘both planned and improvised elements’ (1996: 200). If the lesson is planned and implemented in a very tight way with no any room for improvisation or is not planned at all and therefore entirely improvised, it may not be considered balanced or effective (Van Lier, 1996). In this connection, Ellis (2000) also emphasises that ‘balanced teaching involves teachers moving back and forwards between planned and improvised decision-making in the course of a lesson’ (2000: 214-15).

Intrigued by this notion, I would like to propose a balanced approach which might be

particularly appropriate for practitioner research. Specifically speaking, ‘*balanced research*’ should involve researchers moving back and forwards between pre-designed and adapted plans in the course of research, especially in authentic social contexts such as a classroom. Such adaptations or changes should neither be simply attributed to the researcher’s lack of foresight, nor be regarded as something detrimental to the success of a research study. Rather, looking at the unavoidable changes positively may be a good way to explore more fruitful results than expected.

For this reason, Van Lier’s (1996) suggestion for designing syllabuses and lessons should be appropriate for designing practitioner research as well, that is, ‘to form a small organic culture (or an ecosystem) in themselves, where participants strive to combine the expected and the unexpected, the known and the new, the planned and the improvised, in harmonious ways’ (1996: 200). In other words, practitioner researchers should keep in mind their overall research aim and plan, and meanwhile leave some open space for moment-to-moment decision-making as needed. This sounds exactly like the case in my own research process, as I shall report in the next chapter. In a word, the ‘balanced approach’ has proved to be an entirely appropriate, and even, at times, necessary, one for the present research.

#### **4.4 My proposed research framework—‘3E framework’**

In the light of this balanced approach, I established the 3E framework (see also 1.2.3) to guide my research step by step, especially during the important data-gathering



process. Moreover, this framework drew partly on Dörnyei and Ottó's (1998) *process model*, partly on the *expectancy-value* theory (Eccles and Wigfield, 1995; Wigfield, 1994; Wigfield and Eccles, 2000), and partly on my understanding of this particular institutional context where I studied and taught before. As I mentioned in Chapter 1, the 3E framework was intended to function both as a methodological guideline for data collection, and as a pedagogical blueprint for my task-mediated teaching. Basically, its components (i.e. *Expectation*, *Experience*, and *Evaluation*) represent three relatively independent but mutually related research stages (see Figure 4-1 below).

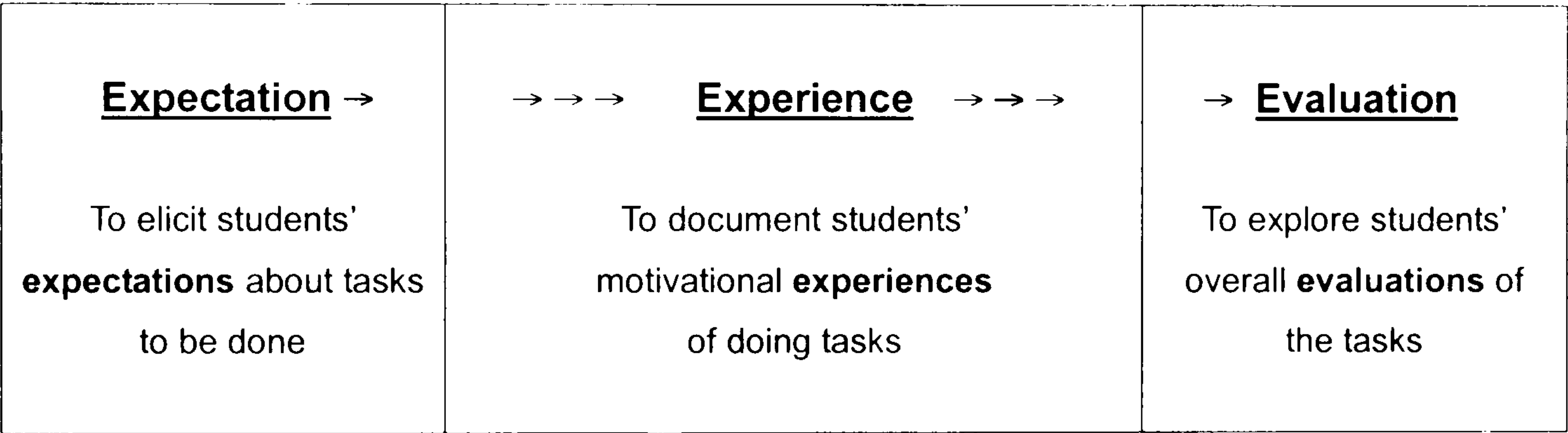


Figure 4-1: 3E Framework

The above diagram is just the basic structure of this framework, and the roughly divided three phases are in accordance with my overall teaching plans for the whole term. Specifically speaking:

- i) The first few weeks of the term could be called '*expectation phase*' during which I planned to conduct a background survey, in order to understand my participants' English learning history in general and their particular expectations regarding

various aspects of the class. ‘Expectation’ has two senses in this research. The first refers to the students’ sense of what they would wish, like, and prefer in terms of the forthcoming class and tasks. I would take their opinions into consideration when planning lessons and writing tasks, hoping to make them feel respected and satisfied that they had some control of their own learning. The second refers to students’ anticipation of the future class activities which, of course, may or may not correspond to their initial thoughts. This sense of expectation would probably be explored at the later evaluation stage, so as to see whether there was any mismatch between their anticipation and the reality and how this might impact on their learning motivation. In general, compared with Dörnyei and Ottó’s (1998) process model, this phase is similar to the ‘preactional stage’ in which students’ ‘choice motivation’ plays an important part.

- ii) The second ‘experience’ stage would begin with the first task, and end with the last one, extending over much of the term. Data expected from this stage included the immediate post-task feedback gathered from every student after every task (about 10 tasks in total), as well as my regular diary in which I jotted down what happened during class, since no close observation was planned. Referring to the Process Model, this phase is similar to the ‘actional stage’, with the difference being that it would involve work with a series of tasks within what I call ‘an extended task-engagement process’ (see 3.4.3).

iii) Finally, during the final ‘evaluation’ stage at the end of term, I planned to use a class period to conduct an overall evaluation survey with all students, followed by some after-class interviews, with myself having an open mind to embrace all possible issues that might come up, relating not only to any particular task, but also to their learning in general, or even to their personal life. This would be the chance to encourage my students to look back on the past months of learning experience in (and outside of) my class. Similar to the ‘postactional stage’ within Dörnyei and Ottó’s (1998) process model, the purpose of planning evaluation activities in my 3E framework was to elicit students’ conscious and critical retrospection which would help them consolidate the experience and prepare the ground for future goals and action. Meanwhile, I myself could gain a further understanding of my students and my past teaching, which would certainly be helpful for my own future professional development.

Explicitly or implicitly, the rationale behind this ‘3E framework’ has shared some of the EP principles. By working closely with students on a series of tasks, I was hoping to understand the motivational influences within and beyond the classroom. Meanwhile, by involving everybody in the research process, I was hoping to bring my students and me (as a teacher-researcher) together in order to promote social harmony and to enhance mutual development. More importantly, I hope, in my future teaching career, to further improve this framework and make it a practical classroom-friendly work plan that can be continuously used term by term, with every



new set of '3E' standing at a higher level. That is, a new expectation for the future is based on the previous evaluations on past experience, and a new evaluation will hopefully lead to a more challenging expectation and an improved experience.

## **4.5 Conclusion**

Together with the previous two chapters (i.e. Chapter 2 and 3), the entire literature review is complete so far. This chapter was particularly devoted to a methodological discussion of relevant research studies in the motivation area. It began with an overview of the approaches adopted in motivation research, followed by a critique of a few key studies of task motivation. It then suggested a 'balanced' approach which would be necessary and appropriate if the motivation research was grounded in authentic classroom contexts. Finally, the chapter discussed my proposed 3E framework which would be used for both research and teaching purposes in the present study.

## **Chapter 5 The Natural History of My Research**

### **5.0 Introduction**

The chapter begins with a brief discussion of some general issues regarding the qualitative approach, and continues with an introduction to some specific research methods within this research paradigm. The major section of the chapter (i.e. 5.3) is a detailed description of the natural history of the present research. I should explain that, following Silverman (2000: 236), this chapter works as an alternative to the more traditional ‘Methodology’ chapter. This major section documents what was expected according to the initial design, how the research went back and forwards during the actual teaching/data-gathering process, as well as what data was eventually collected in the light of the ‘balanced’ approach that I proposed earlier. This chapter ends with a proposed way of approaching the data, which forms the basis of the following two chapters.

### **5.1 Research approach**

In the previous chapter, I have discussed the quantitative and qualitative approaches to motivation research, and clarified that my study of task motivation falls within the qualitative research paradigm. At the beginning section of the present methodology chapter, I shall focus on a few aspects (e.g. strengths and weaknesses, reliability and validity, objectivity and sensitivity, triangulation) regarding the qualitative approach in general, which proved important for me to bear in mind throughout the entire

research process.

### 5.1.1 Strengths and weaknesses

Choosing the qualitative approach does not mean that I do not appreciate its counterpart—quantitative research methods. As Silverman (2005) says, ‘No method of research, quantitative or qualitative, is intrinsically better than any other’ (2005: 6).

What should be considered is the appropriateness of different approaches to different types of research in terms of the research purposes, aims, and questions. By definition, ‘*quantitative* is broadly used to describe what can be counted or measured and can therefore be considered objective; while *qualitative* is used to describe data which are not amenable to being counted or measured in an objective way, and are therefore subjective’ (Wallace, 1998: 38).

The unavoidable ‘subjectivity’ seems to be a salient weakness of qualitative research. Unlike the statistical calculation of quantitative data, the analysis of qualitative data relies very much on the researchers. That is to say, different researchers may come up with different interpretations out of the same data due to the possible different ways they perceive and understand the world. Another limitation of qualitative research is the challenge of the representativeness of its sample. The scope of qualitative data is usually small, so the researcher needs to argue convincingly how representative his chosen cases are. This issue is important because it concerns the extent to which the researcher can make broader inferences and generalisations.



Despite some ‘weaknesses’, the nature of qualitative data exhibits its strengths as well. Specifically speaking, qualitative research often requires of the researchers a personal involvement in the research context and close contact with the research participants. Normally by means of in-depth interviews or observations, qualitative researchers think ‘they can get closer to the actor’s perspective’, whereas ‘quantitative researchers are seldom able to capture their subjects’ perspectives because they have to rely on more remote, inferential empirical methods and materials’ (Denzin and Lincoln, 2000: 10). In this sense, though qualitative data might be small-scale, it is bound to be rich and detailed. Based on careful and critical analysis, inferences drawn from qualitative research can certainly shed meaningful light on the research areas in question.

### **5.1.2 Reliability and validity**

The above discussed strengths and weaknesses boil down to the issues of validity and reliability. When discussing ‘*reliability*’ in qualitative research, for example, Flick (1998) emphasizes the need for explication in two respects—‘the genesis of the data’ and the ‘procedures in the field’ (1998: 224). In order to increase the reliability of such research, documenting the whole process is necessary, which can make it possible for others to check ‘the dependability of data and procedures’ (ibid).

‘*Validity*’ can be interpreted as ‘the extent to which an account accurately represents the social phenomena to which it refers’ (Hammersley, 1990: 57, cited in Silverman,

2005: 210). In qualitative research, researchers may have in-depth access to their chosen cases, hence rich data full of ‘examples’. Therefore, one important consideration of validity is how to ‘convince themselves (and their audience) that their “findings” are genuinely based on critical investigation of all their data and do not depend on a few well-chosen “examples”’ (Silverman, 2005: 211). In other words, in order for the findings to be valid enough to explain what is studied, the researcher needs to be careful of ‘the presentation of phenomena and of the inferences’ drawn from the data (Flick, 1998: 225).

### 5.1.3 Objectivity and sensitivity

Also in the course of interpreting data and making discoveries, a balance between ‘objectivity’ and ‘sensitivity’ is crucially important as well. As Strauss and Corbin (1998) state, ‘*objectivity* is necessary to arrive at an impartial and accurate interpretation of events’, and ‘*sensitivity* is required to perceive the subtle nuances and meanings in data and to recognise the connections between concepts’ (1998: 42-43). In qualitative research, maintaining an objective stance means being open and willing to listen and to give voices to the respondents, while having a sensitive mind means being able to discern the true nature of the happenings in data (Strauss and Corbin, 1998).

Both criteria are very relevant to my research process. As may happen in many other qualitative studies, there would be a constant interplay between me as a teacher

researcher and my research act which is teaching and gathering data. During this process, my data collection act would proceed in an on-going manner, involving analysis, improvisation, further collection, and further analysis. On the one hand, I should show full respect and understanding to what I see, what my participants do and say, without allowing my existing experience, personal values and bias to affect the objectivity of my interpretations and judgements. On the other hand, an open mind does not mean an empty head (Dey, 1993). Sensitivity to the facts only builds in a prepared mind. As Dey (1993) points out, 'To analyse data, we need to use accumulated knowledge, not dispense with it. The issue is not whether to use existing knowledge but how' (1993: 63; cited in Strauss and Corbin, 1998: 47). Therefore, it is equally important for me to be aware of the way that not only I but also my participants understand the events, and to develop a quality to give meanings to the data by correctly using my professional and personal experience. To some extent, this seems to be what the 'balanced' approach aims to achieve as well.

#### **5.1.4 Triangulation**

Criteria like reliability and validity are often regarded as more suitable for judging the quality of quantitative research, although as classical criteria, they can be applied to qualitative research too. But meanwhile, 'method-appropriate criteria' have been developed over time in order to co-judge the quality of qualitative research (Flick, 1998: 229). In this regard, triangulation has been seen as a good approach.



As Flick (1998) summarises, *triangulation* is used to 'name the combination of different methods, study groups, local and temporal settings, and different theoretical perspectives in dealing with a phenomenon' (1998: 229). Among the four types of triangulation (i.e. data triangulation, investigator triangulation, theory triangulation, and methodological triangulation) distinguished by Denzin (1989), the last one is what I am mainly concerned with as it makes more sense to my research design. Simply speaking, in the light of my research topics, I planned to combine different research methods in my study, aiming to 'increase scope, depth, and consistency in methodological proceedings' (Flick, 1998: 230). In addition, during the data analysis process, I would consider inviting a second researcher to co-judge some of my data, as allowing different ways of looking at the data would help achieve 'objectivity' as much as possible (Silverman, 2005).

## **5.2 Research methods**

There are quite a few methods that can be employed in qualitative research. By nature, they cannot be judged as good or bad, true or false. Rather, they are more or less useful, depending on their fit with the research area that is to be explored (Silverman, 2005). In this subsection, I am going to discuss the following three methods that I planned to use for data collection.

### **5.2.1 Questionnaires and interviews**

Basically these two research methods are used to elicit answers from research participants by asking closed or open-ended questions either on paper or orally.

Therefore, I am going to put them into one group to contrast their differences and discuss their similar limitations.

Questionnaires are generally regarded as a typical quantitative research technique, because the questions are usually set out in a very systematic way so that the collected data can be statistically calculated and analysed. Certainly, questionnaires may have a role to play in qualitative research as well. Apart from working as a 'selecting tool' at the preliminary stage for some research, questionnaires with open-ended items may also elicit rich data for qualitative analysis purposes.

Interviewing is one of the most commonly used methods in qualitative research as it may provide researchers with in-depth access to the research participants. By this means, researchers may well get to know their knowledge, opinions, ideas and experiences (Wallace, 1998). The biggest difference between interviews and questionnaires is that the former is more like a conversation which allows the interviewer and the interviewee to have a real-time interaction; while the flow of information in questionnaires is one-way so that it is less likely for both parties to have 'online' communication. In this aspect, interviews seem to be able to elicit more reliable in-depth data than questionnaires can. But on the other hand, the statistical data collected from questionnaires yield findings which may be more readily generalised into objective conclusions. Therefore, questionnaires and interviews are

often used in a complementary way.

Like all other research methods, interviews and questionnaires inevitably have some limitations which may affect the validity and reliability of the research results. The first point is *subjectivity*, which is what I have mentioned earlier when talking about the weakness of qualitative research in general (Wallace, 1998). When we ask people a question, no matter whether orally or on paper, we are very often uncertain of the extent to which the respondents are telling the truth. Sometimes they may answer the questions with certain reservations in order to show their strengths and to disguise their weaknesses. Therefore, when we evaluate the resulting data, we need to carefully consider the quality of the responses, the possible hidden motivations of the respondents and so on. As Wallace (1998) says, ‘the important issue here is to be sensible and realistic about evaluating data presented through questionnaires and interviews’ (1998: 127).

The second point is the *representativeness* of the sample. This is a potential drawback because in most cases it is impossible to get data from the entire population that one is investigating. Instead, we usually choose a sample of subjects representative of the total group of which they are a part. Therefore, a number of questions need to be taken into consideration, e.g., what is the proper sample size for the research? How representative is the sample? Is it a random sample or not? All in all, we should be open and honest to ourselves and our audience about the limitations



of the sample. As Wallace (1998) emphasizes, ‘the important thing is not to generalise from your data unless you have a sound basis for doing so’ (1998: 128).

### 5.2.2 Ethical considerations in interviews

Interviewing, as one of the most powerful ways qualitative researchers use to understand people and the world, is more than just an art of asking questions and getting answers. Apart from choosing appropriate interview types (e.g. structured, semi-structured, unstructured) and designing appropriate questions, there are some other ethical issues that should be taken into consideration, for example, the identities of the interviewer and the interviewee, the relationship between two parties, the manner in which the questions are asked, and the feelings and emotions of the respondents. These issues are all embedded in different social interaction contexts, whether explicitly or implicitly, and will all affect the reliability and validity of the research findings.

In the literature, Fontana and Frey (1998) list three traditional ethical concerns around ‘the topics of *informed consent* (consent received from the subject after he or she has been carefully and truthfully informed about the research), *right to privacy* (protecting the identity of the subject) and *protection from harm* (physical, emotional, or any other kind)’ (1998: 70). In addition, we should also be aware of the issue which stems from ‘the degree of involvement on the part of the researcher with the group under study’ (Fontana and Frey, 1998: 71). This issue is crucial to me as my

identity in the present study is a teacher researcher, which indicates a deep personal involvement with my students who are also my research participants for some quality time. To some degree, our teacher-student relationship might influence what they would say during interviews. To minimise the potential danger that they would only provide desirable responses and withhold relevant information from me, I would try to establish a truthful and trustworthy interactive environment for our talk. In this regard, I agree with Fontana and Frey's (1998) viewpoint that we as interviewers should also disclose ourselves as we try to learn about others. In a sense, sincere communication could hardly take place without mutual trust or respect between human beings. This is true in the real world, and so in research.

### **5.2.3 Research diary**

Different from the above two methods which are designed to seek data from the research participants, research diaries are produced by the researchers themselves. Generally speaking, the purpose of keeping a research diary is to record the development of the ongoing research process (Flick, 1998; Silverman, 2005). As Silverman (2005) suggests, it is important to keep proper records in this way, as it may document how one's thinking develops with all possible setbacks and dead ends, and may help to make one's reasoning transparent (2005: 249). This suggestion also implies that it is natural for researchers to experience ups and downs during the process, especially in the case of qualitative research. Confronting some dead ends is not terrible; the important thing is to keep 'an open-ended and critical approach' to

one's research (ibid). As regards my research. I planned to keep a regular diary during the process, but would only use it as backup rather than as main data. Its primary purpose was to help me remember all relevant happenings and organise my developing thinking.

### **5.3 The study**

The above discussed research approach and methods are general issues regarding methodology. From this section till the end of this chapter, I shall focus on the present research. I will begin with the initial research design, and then describe the actual process, and conclude by proposing a way of analysing data. Referring to Silverman's (2000, see also Alasuutari, 1995: 192) notion of 'natural history' and my proposed 'balanced' approach to the present research, I am going to adopt a somewhat autobiographic style when reporting how I was moving back and forwards between my research plan and the actual situation, according to the unexpected ups and downs during the research process.

#### **5.3.1 Initial research design—3E framework**

At the end of Chapter 4, I introduced the main structure of the '3E framework'—Expectation, Experience, Evaluation—which was particularly designed to guide my four-month fieldwork. In this kind of classroom-based research, I would arrange data collection as part of my normal class teaching, except for interviews. According to the 3E framework, I expected to collect data at the following three stages, with the prepared instruments respectively.



### **5.3.1.1 Expectation stage and its research instruments**

I planned to spend a couple of weeks at the first stage to get data about students' expectations. There are two reasons for allotting so much time to this stage. Firstly, I wished to establish a good rapport with all my students before I started any of my research. Secondly, it would take some time for me to plan my lessons and to prepare the task after collecting and analysing the 'expectation' data.

To begin with, I planned to conduct an introductory activity, by means of brainstorming and direct input, to get my students familiar with the notion of 'tasks'.

Then I intended to carry out a brief survey seeking to understand students' expectations of tasks in particular and their English learning history in general.

Basically, the task-related questions would include:

1. The language focus involved in tasks (i.e. listening, speaking, reading, writing, translating).
2. The participatory structure (i.e. individual work, pair work, group work, teacher-fronted work).
3. Task topics (depending to a great extent on the prescribed textbook).

At the stage of designing the research, I could only prepare the above questions to ask for my students' preferences, as there were no ready-to-use tasks for them to choose. As the 'balanced approach' implies, I would have to wait until I was immersed in the teaching situation, and then begin to write tasks based on students' opinions, my task-design knowledge, and the curriculum requirement of the university.

As regards my participants' English learning history, I hoped to ask the following questions, aiming to elicit detailed answers which might help me understand their background and increase my awareness of their learning needs:

***Background information (knowledge about past experience and current situation)***

1. How do you think of your past experience of learning English at school?
2. To what extent do you feel yourself interested/uninterested in this language?
3. Did you choose to learn English as your major before you entered this college? If yes, what was your motivation to do that? If no, how do you feel now when you actually become an English major?
4. How do you rate your current English level compared with what you know about your classmates?
5. How do you think of your various English abilities (e.g. listening, speaking, etc.)?

***Metacognitive information (knowledge and beliefs about language learning)***

1. How do you perceive your own role/responsibility of learning a foreign language?
2. According to your past experience, what strategies of learning English did you find effective and successful?
3. Have you found any difference between learning English and learning other subjects? What do you think the difference is?
4. What do you think of the usefulness of learning English for your future?
5. What is your aim of learning this language at university level?

The above 10 items are all open-ended questions as I position this research as a qualitative study. In the meantime, I was aware that there would be more than 50 students in my class, in which case the data from all of them might be too extensive for me to manage. Therefore, I planned to select only about 10-15 students' answers for detailed analysis. For ethical reasons, I did not want to make anyone feel excluded. So I decided to invite and encourage every student to join in; meanwhile, I would just select every 5th student as my 'real' participants according to their student numbers (without letting them know this selection). For instance, I could choose student No.5, No.10, No.15, No.20, etc. (*Note, every student has an official student*

*number given by the university, from 1-50. All the female students are followed by all the male students, and the orders are approximately based on their scores of college entrance exams. Although this ranking does not necessarily mean the actual hierarchy of students' intelligence or abilities, it more or less reflects the general trend of students' achievement levels.*) In this way I could focus on a certain number of individuals over the whole term. However, an inevitable problem lying in this method is that the questionnaires would not be anonymous in a strict sense although the students were just requested to write down their student numbers rather than names.

#### **5.3.1.2 Experience stage and its research instruments**

After the first stage I would prepare a series of tasks ready for the students to do in my class, based on the preliminary analysis of the first set of data collected. Then the 'experience' stage would begin and it would cover the longest period of the entire term. The data I was going to collect were students' post-task feedback on their task-engagement experience and feelings of doing different tasks. By means of eliciting written feedback from the participants instead of recording their performance or linguistic products, I hoped to see the effectiveness and suitability of those designed and adapted tasks from their own points of view.

In a sense, the data received in this phase might be similar to the retrospective evaluation data to be gathered in the third phase. However, I would argue that the



difference between these two phases lies in the different degrees of students' involvement and in their different perspectives. At the 'experience stage', I would be concerned with students' 'immediate' thoughts about various aspects of a single task from a micro perspective. At the later 'evaluation' stage, students would be encouraged to look back on all the tasks that they had experienced over the term. It was hoped that they would reflect on the past experience from a macro perspective, based on necessary comparison, contrast, and overall evaluation. In other words, 'evaluation' comes out of 'experience' but is likely to be more critical and comprehensive.

Also in the experience stage, I myself would take down my own comments on students' overall reaction to the task such as what the class atmosphere was like, or what percentage of students 'looked' engaged in the task from my point of view. As regards the way of collecting data at this stage, I hoped to keep it simple but frequent, either individually or via group reports. In addition, in reward for their contributions, I would frequently give feedback to their comments so as to keep them feeling involved and respected. Hopefully, the data collected from this stage would be timely, specific, and targeted. The instruments that I planned to use were as follows:

On-line questionnaire

Part I General impression:

Please answer the following questions by ticking on the proper point in the 7-point scale which is in between ten pairs of adjectives with opposite meanings.

7-point scale			7	6	5	4	3	2	1	
Questions 1-10										
1	Do you like the way of doing this task? (e.g. individually, in pairs)	Like								Dislike
2	How do you rate the difficulty level of this task?	Easy								Difficult
3	Do you like the content of this task? (focus, topic, etc.)	Like								Dislike
4	Do you feel this task interesting?	Interesting								Boring
5	Do you feel this task useful?	Useful								Not useful
6	How do you think about your own performance?	Excellent								Poor
7	Do you feel yourself well motivated to do this task?	Motivated								Unmotivated
8	Were you confident when doing this task just now?	Confident								Unconfident
9	Were you nervous when doing this task just now?	Nervous								Not nervous
10	How much have you learned from this task? (Any aspect)	A lot								Nothing

Part II More specific task knowledge

1. What did you think the purpose of this task is?
2. What did you think you were expected to learn from this task? Did you really learn what you had thought? Why or why not?
3. How did you think this task may or may not satisfy your personal learning needs?
4. Which aspect of this task do you think might be improved for future use?
5. Which aspect of this task do you think is motivating to you?
6. Is there anything that made you feel uncomfortable with the task just now?

This on-line questionnaire was supposed to be handed out to students immediately after doing every task. I decided to do it in class for three reasons. Firstly, the students would have a fresh and clear impression when a task was just finished. Secondly, taking class time to do this questionnaire would make students feel it a natural part of class content rather than an out-of-class burden, which might 'push' them to treat it more willingly and carefully. Thirdly, whenever students had any questions regarding the task and the questionnaire, I could address these there and then so that potential misunderstandings would be avoided.

This questionnaire contains two parts, with the first one being concerned about students' general and immediate impression of doing the task, and the second one being focused on students' deep insights into the task purpose, task nature, task demands. With respect to the 10 closed questions in Part I, these would be analysed statistically for the whole class and then I would have a rough idea about how they felt about the task and about themselves. As regards the other open-ended questions in Part II, I planned to track the answers of the same students as in Stage one, so as to keep a continuous record of their expectations, experience, as well as their evaluations in the next stage. One more point I would like to make here is that all the questionnaires were not supposed to be exactly the same throughout this stage. I might possibly make some necessary improvisation during each lesson in order to find out the most relevant information in the most appropriate way.



5.3.1.3 Evaluation stage and its research instruments

The ‘evaluation’ stage would cover the last couple of weeks of the term (before the final exams). By then, all the designed tasks should have been carried out, and the participants would be expected to evaluate their experiences with tasks in an all-sided and reflective way. Considering that some of the early conducted tasks might have been more or less forgotten, I planned to guide students to look back at what we had done before. Every task would be numbered and a few key words which might represent the particular task features would be given. Hopefully this review might help refresh students’ memory and get them to think again about their opinions to be made on the following evaluation sheet:

Overall evaluation

Please answer the following 13 questions by ticking under the proper number(s) which represent all the 10 tasks that we have done in class.

Tasks 1-10		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Questions 1-7											
1	In general, which task do you find very interesting?										
2	Doing which task is the most enjoyable experience in your memory?										
3	With which task did you find yourself best motivated?										
4	On which task do you feel your effort is most worthwhile to you?										
5	Which task do you feel most important to your language learning?										
6	Which task do you feel most useful to your personal development?										
7	Which task do you feel most closely related to your future career goals?										

Tasks 1-10		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Questions 8-13											
8	Which task do you feel most challenging to you?										
9	Is there any task that demotivated you?										
10	Is there any task that made you feel very nervous and uncomfortable?										
11	In doing which task did you feel least confident?										
12	Which task is the last one that you want to do again in the future?										
13	Is there any task that destroyed your motivation or interest after doing it?										

(Note: intrinsic value—1-3; attainment value/importance—4-5; extrinsic utility value/usefulness—7-8; cost/investment—8-13. Please refer to 3.3.1.2)

This is a preliminary questionnaire that aimed to elicit opinions from the whole class. It might be argued that this kind of answer is a bit ‘superficial’. However, owing to the large class size, it would be difficult for me to get deep and rich insights from every student. As a first step, I just wanted to have a general idea about their task preference by looking at the ‘hard’ numbers. Furthermore, I planned to conduct several semi-structured interviews with those few students whom I had tracked over the whole term. The main questions would be the same as those on the above evaluation sheet. The significant difference is that I would ask about the reasons behind each of their answers. In other words, when the whole class answered the sheet, I just needed to know ‘what’ their responses were; while in the follow-up interviews, I would be more interested in ‘why’ their answers were like that.

After analysing the data of this stage along with other data collected before, hopefully I could come up with some suggestions about: i) which tasks were perceived to be motivating in this context and why, ii) what the students' motives were in working with those tasks favoured by themselves and why. In the meantime, I also hoped the whole learning process over the term could offer students a taste of learning more autonomously, more independently, and more consciously, since they would be 'pushed' to state their *expectations*, to think about their *experiences*, and to do some *evaluations* throughout the process.

### 5.3.2 The participants

However, even before I could feel really confident about my research plan described above, things started to change extremely quickly. The first problem I confronted was my target research participants. Initially, I wanted to ask for *one* class of *first-or-second-year* English majors from my former university as my participants, but eventually I was allocated *two* classes of *final-year* students instead. This was completely against my expectation, not only because final-year students might be more likely to react unfavourably to pedagogical innovation; but also because I, as an inexperienced young teacher, was not confident in teaching higher level classes at the time.

Nevertheless, I decided to undertake what seemed to me a 'tough' job, with the strong will to experience an authentic teaching situation and see how it could be



‘balanced’. Therefore, I accepted the arrangement as in reality few teachers have the freedom to choose the class they want.

The second problem was I soon realised that these two classes happened to be my former students from two years before! My worry about meeting old students did not result from any unhappy memory with them at all. Rather, it was the excellent relationship between us that made me a bit ‘scared’. I was afraid of going back to the same class but in a very different situation: my students had grown up and they might have changed from being always curious about everything to being somewhat indifferent to anything irrelevant; with improved English proficiency, they must have higher expectations of my teaching; with more diversified personal objectives towards graduation, they must have different learning needs as well. I was concerned about this somewhat complicated situation so was to some extent well prepared to face the unpredictable changes and to make improvised decisions at any moment.

With this complex set of feelings towards my old students, I flew back to China and started my fieldwork. Yet when I stood in the classroom, being surrounded by smiles and applause, I suddenly realised how much I still cared about my students. Somehow I began to regret my plan to ‘use’ them for my personal research purpose. Just at that moment, I saw the difficulties, especially in the sense of ethics, that I was going to confront—I would have to struggle between my research pressure and my teaching beliefs, between my research expectations and my teaching responsibilities.

between my own research aims and my students' learning needs, between what I wanted from them as a researcher and how I felt about them as a teacher. What a challenging journey lay ahead!

### **5.3.3 The actual process of teaching<sup>3</sup>**

#### **5.3.3.1 The preparation**

Knowing that I must first rid myself of any feeling that I was being 'selfish' before getting my work going, I kept telling myself that my research would by no means do any harm to my students. As they would understand one day, introducing 'tasks' into class aimed to make them more motivated for language learning; and inviting them to participate in the research (such as writing up feedback, doing reflection) would help increase their awareness of the learning process.

Despite these research beliefs, I still could not help thinking that my role as a researcher should stand in second place in the classroom. Meanwhile, ethical considerations seemed to become more crucial. To avoid making students feel that they would have to invest extra time and put up with deviations from normal classroom routine, I minimised reference to what I had been doing as a Ph.D. student in the UK. Instead, I talked seriously about my plan for our course including the idea of bringing some new methods into the class. I was trying to convince them that everything I would do in the class was for the purpose of teaching well. This seemed

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<sup>3</sup> This section is adapted from Li, 2006.

to be a proper strategy as I noticed that the students did not show much interest about my research but did show their trust in me and my proposed way of teaching, with nods and smiles.

### **5.3.3.2 The beginning**

For various unexpected reasons, unfortunately, the first month of my fieldwork was unsuccessful. To begin with, I was late arriving back in China, which meant my students missed more than a week of classes at the start of term. During the following few days, our class was ‘interrupted’ a couple of times again by my sick leave and an important family affair. Then, several days after I recovered and went back to work, it was time for a 7-day national holiday. So quickly and unknowingly, the first month was gone and we had had just a few irregular classes. I was quite upset because such a situation not only disturbed my research schedule but also left my students with a bad impression, which might make the remaining work even tougher.

### **5.3.3.3 The middle**

After the week-long holiday, my classes started to run regularly. It was then that I finally settled down and got used to the busy life and work. Although I had prepared myself psychologically before going back, I still felt stressed because of a heavy teaching load and the necessary preparation time, plus setting and marking coursework assignments and examinations. To add to my anxiety, there was always



something happening which was beyond my control and expectation. Together with other English teachers who were in charge of final-year students. I was asked by our department to suspend the course we were teaching, and turn it into a test-taking training programme so as to prepare students for an important forthcoming National English test (TEM-8). This programme ran for more than a month till the end of term, which unavoidably disrupted my overall teaching/researching plan and gave me the added burden of having to redesign my classes.

#### **5.3.3.4 Other struggles throughout the term**

It should be pointed out that the first term of the final year is an unusual and crucial stage for university students in China, because most of them are preparing for the postgraduate examination which arrives at the end of that term. Every year, all departments in my university tend, although sometimes implicitly, to give the ‘green light’ to those prospective exam takers, in the hope that more students would be successful, which is important for the university’s reputation as well. Under such circumstances, students are happy to study on their own rather than go to classes, since what is taught in class may not be directly relevant or useful for their exams. Therefore, I unavoidably came across a seriously low attendance rate in my classes –only one-third of the students attended the course regularly, hence the adverse influence on my initial research plan.

### **5.3.4 The actual process of researching**

Since I attempted to explore students' task motivation in an authentic teaching/learning situation, I was very aware that ethical issues would be crucially important, regarding how the research was carried out and how I could gain my participants' cooperation while showing full respect to their normal life and study. I carefully integrated my designed tasks into the normal class at the time when I thought most appropriate, without going against the overall curriculum at all. Meanwhile, I understood that I was not able to fix everything a hundred per cent too far in advance, because I needed to take students' opinions on task design into consideration, and must be sensitive to their reactions to my research activities based on which I might need to make improvisational decisions to modify my research methods. This reflects not only the nature of my 3E framework, but also the requirement of the 'balanced' approach.

#### **5.3.4.1 All tasks conducted**

During the fieldwork, I invested a great deal of time and effort in adapting prepared tasks, designing new tasks, and studying students' task feedback so as to make further adaptations to the later tasks. In the process of writing tasks, the 'general framework for task design' that I introduced in Chapter 2 (Section 2.3.5 and Table 2-2) served as a guideline; and the prescribed textbook provided a solid topic content basis. In addition, students' preferences for the given topics (i.e. part of 'expectation-stage' data) decided the sequence of task implementation. Details about

the data analysis and its influence on task sequence will be reported in the next chapter. In this section, I am going to just focus on all the 10 tasks that were conducted in my class.

10 tasks	Task type	Stage	Language skills	Participatory structure
1. Reading and discussion —different ways of doing things. (Text I, Unit 6)	Comprehension task (text-related)	While-reading stage	Reading, speaking	Individual and pair work
2. Discussion—objectives of college education. (Text I, Unit 7)	Opinion task (topic-related)	Pre-reading stage	Speaking,	Group work and teacher-fronted discussion
3. Peer-teaching. (Text II, Unit 7)	Comprehension task (text-related)	While-reading stage	Reading, speaking, listening	Individual work
4. Problem solving — a controversial picture in Liverpool. (Text I, Unit 9)	Opinion task (topic-related)	Post-reading stage	Listening, speaking	Pair work and teacher-fronted discussion
5. Compare and contrast English/American concepts of space. (Text I, Unit 1)	Comprehension task (text-related)	While-reading stage	Reading, speaking	Individual and pair work
6. Picture drawing — to illustrate a textbook story. (Text II, Unit 1)	Comprehension task (text-related)	While-reading stage	Reading	Individual/pair work, teacher-fronted work
7. Email writing (text I, Unit 4)	Opinion task (topic-related)	Pre-reading stage	writing	Individual and Teacher-fronted work
8. Discussion—difficulties in English writing. (Text I, Unit 4)	Opinion task (topic-related)	Post-reading stage	Speaking	Group work and Teacher-fronted work
9. Compare and contrast — about Railway System. (Text I, Unit 3)	Opinion task (topic-related)	Pre-reading stage	Speaking	Teacher-fronted work
10. Sharing personal experience — living at home or on campus.(Text II, Unit 3)	Opinion task (topic-related)	Pre-reading stage	Speaking	Group work and teacher-fronted work

*Table 5-1: Ten tasks conducted during the fieldwork*



Regarding this table, the first column contains the key words of each individual task, which may give the reader a rough idea of what every task is about. The information in the brackets indicates the sources of the tasks, but it does not mean they are ready-made in the textbook (Note: introduction to the textbook can be found in 1.3.3. and a couple of sample texts are attached in Appendix 5). The second column in the above Table indicates the *task types* suggested in my proposed task typology (see 2.3.3). The third column indicates the *stage* in which each task was carried out (see 2.3.4.1). The fourth column specifies the main *language skills* that learners were supposed to use while doing certain tasks. Finally, the column of '*participatory structure*' explains the way in which each task was implemented (see 2.3.4.2). Some further background information on every task as well as the detailed implementing procedures can be found in Appendix 1.

#### **5.3.4.2 Improvised methods and all gathered data**

Apart from the hard work of designing tasks, the overall data-gathering process was also rather difficult in the sense that I had to rely on my students to a great extent. For the sake of my research and teaching, imposing self-discipline on myself was not a problem, even if I ended up feeling exhausted. However, making extra demands on students for my purpose made me feel a bit upset. Out of ethical considerations, I was unwilling to ask students to do anything that they seemed reluctant to do, especially when there were just a small number of students present in class. Thinking that it must have been a difficult decision to come to my class instead of choosing to

study on their own like the others, I was afraid that even they would also leave my class one day if I frequently asked them to do such time-consuming things as writing up feedback. From time to time, I clearly felt the tensions between pursuing my research goals as a researcher and fulfilling my professional responsibilities as a teacher.

In addition, lack of time made the data collection process even more difficult. As my class did not meet regularly during the first month, I could not get all the data I wanted from the first ‘expectation’ stage. At the second ‘experience’ stage, I had much pressure making up the missed classes and catching up with the overall curriculum schedule, hence I had to minimize the time needed for data collection. The third ‘evaluation’ stage was totally disrupted by the departmental requirement to change the course. Under such circumstances, I had no choice but to give up some of my research plans so as to show consideration for the students and the university.

All these unfavourable conditions ‘forced’ me to make ‘balanced’ changes to my original research plan:

- i) At the ‘expectation’ stage, I only asked my students to respond to the first group of closed questions (regarding task design). The late start of our class and the unexpected loss of time (i.e. my sick leave and the national holiday) made me have to give up the entire survey that I had planned (see 5.3.1.1).

ii) At the ‘experience’ stage, post-task feedback was only gathered from a few students after some of the tasks in a much simpler way. That is, I only asked those who attended the class to write freely about how they felt about the tasks. I did try my pre-designed questionnaire (see 5.3.1.2) once but disappointedly found it inappropriate. On the one hand, students’ expressions told me they did not like answering those questions. Probably they did not really understand the intent of the questions and therefore seemed to think them ‘silly’; or perhaps filling in a questionnaire was an unusual thing to do in normal classes and therefore they were unwilling to accept it. On the other hand, when I read their completed questionnaires after class, I did not find their responses really useful. After the first unsuccessful experiment, I decided to change the method to ‘reflective writing’ to collect their post-task feedback. With more freedom and flexibility, my students seemed to feel comfortable to express their thoughts in this way without having to answer any particular questions. Indeed, I found that most of their answers became richer and could demonstrate their deeper thinking about the tasks.

iii) Finally, at the ‘evaluation’ stage, my planned teacher-fronted evaluation class did not run due to the unexpected suspension of our course; and the semi-structured individual interviews were replaced by four group interviews due to the limited time. Another reason for cancelling the evaluation class was related to students’ irregular attendance during the course. As I have explained, our course changed into a test-taking training class during the last month. For this reason, many students re-joined the class without knowing much about our implemented tasks



because of their previous absence. In this situation, I could not really take class time to carry out the evaluation plan.

Although the data I collected did not entirely match my expectation, I managed to get some extra data, i.e. more than 120 letters from all my students during the fieldwork and follow-up emails from eight of them one and half years later. The first idea of asking for individual letters occurred to me after I had noticed the low attendance rate for quite some time. Taking advantage of the mid-term test, I asked every student to write a personal letter to me explaining why they came or did not come to the class. I left them sufficient freedom and encouraged them to express their true thoughts without reservation. The letter was only a part of the exam which would not be taken into account when I gave marks. Moreover, students could feel free to write either in English or in Chinese as they liked. I also promised to treat every letter seriously and to reply to them individually, which I did. My confidence in this way of communication came from our shared history and mutual trust, as we had used this method two years before and it had proved successful and reliable.

After analysing these letters and seeing their great value at later stages of my research, I was very interested to hear my participants' later thoughts about English learning, thus I decided to get back to some of them via email. When we got in touch, it was one and half years after the fieldwork, and a year since they had graduated from the university. There were no particular criteria for choosing the contacts. I simply wanted to find some students who were engaged in different areas of activity

after graduation. Based on my knowledge, I contacted around 10 students—some had got jobs in the business area such as state-owned or foreign-invested companies, some had become English teachers, and others were doing various postgraduate studies in different universities. I sent out emails containing the following question and got replies from eight of them eventually:

‘Looking back at the final year when you were at the university (especially when I was teaching you *Advanced English Reading* course), do you have different understanding of it now? If you were asked to give some advice to the current final-year English majors, what would you say to them?’

My purpose of putting this somewhat broad question was to ask them to feel free to say anything they had in mind. But primarily I hoped they could reflect on their final-year experience of learning English, in or out of class, with teachers or by themselves. In addition, there was no length or language requirement for their answers. Certainly, I informed them that their answers would be of help to my current research, and they were all happy to let me use their emails for this purpose. To summarise this subsection, I list all my gathered data in the following table:

<b>Expectation (<i>quantitative, anonymous</i>)</b>
1. Opinions on task topics—the new order to be followed when learning through the textbook
2. Opinions on participatory structure—the preferred ways of organising tasks
<b>Experience (<i>qualitative, onymous</i>)</b>
1. Post-task feedback—immediate and open-ended written comments on individual tasks
2. Mid-term letters—students’ explanation for their frequent attendance/absence
<b>Evaluation (<i>qualitative, onymous</i>)</b>
1. Group interviews—retrospective evaluations on tasks, and talks of broader issues
2. Follow-up emails—reflective writing on previous English learning experience

Table 5-2: All gathered data

All in all, some data was gathered following the plan, while other data was collected on the spur of the moment. They all formed a valuable basis for my later reflection, enabling me to understand my students and their learning motivation deeply. Upon ethical consideration, I purposely cut the weight of my identity as a researcher and tried to present myself only as a teacher in my class, because I really did not want to leave an impression to my students that I was there to ‘use’ them as some ‘subjects’ for my research. Having an intention to treat my students sincerely with care and respect, I decided not to clarify to them at the time of data collection that I was hoping to use their voices for research purposes. Rather, I tried to naturally make them feel that what they did was just part of our classroom activities for the purpose of reflecting on their learning and helping me reflect on my teaching. This is a true pedagogical purpose which had nothing to do with ‘cheating’ or ‘lying’. In addition, I was hoping that by conducting this kind of somewhat ‘covert’ data collection, I could hear my students’ voices as true to themselves as possible; and at the same time could avoid letting them feel an extra burden. It was towards the end of the fieldwork when I asked them (unfortunately not every student was present) if they would mind me using their task feedback and letters for my research, and they all gave me their informal consent. Although due to the low attendance rate I did not get consent from every student, I was confident that they would all be happy to support me thanks to our mutual trust and reliable teacher-student relationship. Certainly, I promised none of their private information would appear anywhere in my thesis or in public.



In effect, it seemed that my four-month fieldwork both necessitated (according to the initial research aim) and ended up (according to the actual teaching/researching situations) involving a ‘balanced’ approach. More importantly, my personal involvement in the situation proved to be an efficient way to experience the uncertainty, complexity, and authenticity of classroom life, and I am hopeful that this perspective will contribute some insights to motivation research.

## **5.4 Way of approaching the data**

Regarding all the data summarised above, I am going to divide them into two groups for the analysis and discussion purposes. The first one comprises all task-related data, including my participants’ task design preferences collected at the ‘expectation’ stage, their post-task feedback collected at the ‘experience’ stage, and the group interviews conducted at the ‘evaluation’ stage. The second group contains the rest of the data, that is, students’ mid-term letters collected at the ‘experience’ stage as well as the follow-up emails obtained at the extended ‘evaluation’ stage. This group of data may not be specific to any particular task, but may reveal various other learning issues instead which will help explain my students’ task-specific motivation and their general language learning motivation.

This way of categorisation also corresponds with the main research aims and questions introduced in the first chapter (see 1.2.3). Though the research questions are all related to ‘task motivation’ which is the main theme of this thesis, they can be

investigated at different levels. Looking at the first group of data aims to understand how learners' task motivations are determined by the specific task situations and task features, which is the investigation at a micro level. Looking at the second group of data is intended to see the broader contextual, social, and cultural influences that the learners may bring with them to the language class and to the tasks that they are supposed to do. This investigation is at a macro level and concerns learners' motivation for learning and other things, rather than for tasks only.

As most of the data was obviously qualitative in nature, I planned to deal with them by means of content analysis. Despite the predetermined research aims, I would keep an open mind and look into the data in an exploratory manner, which was also in line with the 'balanced' approach that I proposed for the research. That is to say, I would allow the themes to emerge from the data instead of creating any template beforehand. For this purpose, I planned to do free coding first, then categorise them according to the similarities and relevance, based on which I would make interpretations and theoretical discussions. Details of the analysis process and results will be reported in the following two chapters.

## **5.5 Conclusion**

This chapter consisted of four main sections. Following the previous chapter which reviewed methodological issues in the L2 motivation literature, the first two sections in this chapter further discussed some relevant issues regarding the research approach

in general and research methods in particular, primarily in connection with the qualitative research paradigm. The third section turned to the present study per se. It reported the natural history of the research process in detail, including the initial research design and the improvised changes made during the teaching/data-gathering fieldwork. The chapter ended with a proposal for approaching the data which underpins the following two chapters on data analysis and discussion.



## **Chapter 6 Data Analysis and Discussion (I)**

### **6.0 Introduction**

This is the first part of the data analysis and discussion which mainly focuses on the task-related data at a micro level. The first major part integrates the theoretical discussion with the specific analysis of the gathered data. It begins with a brief description of the data organisation, based on which students' perceived motivating task features and the identified sources of task motivation are discussed. The second major part further discusses three emergent dimensions of task motivation, that is, academic motivation, personal development motivation, and affective motivation.

### **6.1 Analysis and discussion of task-related data**

According to the way of approaching data that I proposed at the end of the previous chapter (see 5.4 and Table 5-2), I grouped all the task-related data together and re-organised them more systematically for the analysis and discussion purposes in this chapter. As indicated, this group of data aims to investigate my participants' task motivation at a micro level, particularly how specific task features and the immediate task-implementation context influenced students' linguistic, cognitive and affective responses to the different tasks. To begin with, I am going to give a certain methodical account of how I organised and analysed the gathered data, in order to lay the foundation for later discussion.

## 6.1.1 Data organisation

### 6.1.1.1 Top five tasks

As my intention was to find out the most motivating task features perceived by my participants, I decided to focus only on the top five tasks selected by them. In this connection, a particular question in the interviews was to ask every interviewee to review all tasks and then pick two tasks that they liked most, with an explanation of the reasons underlying their criteria and choices. Based on their responses listed in the following table (Table 6-1), I came up with a chart (Figure 6-1) that shows the final scores for each task. It clearly shows which tasks compose the top five. *(Please note that the task number such as 'Task 4' does not correspond with the Unit number such as 'Unit 4'.)* For reference, the Table is followed by a summary list of all ten tasks.

Interview groups	Interviewees	1 <sup>st</sup> place tasks (two points each)	2 <sup>nd</sup> place tasks (one point each)
Group 1 (From Class Two)	Interviewee 1 (S1) <sup>4</sup>	Task 4	Task 10
	Interviewee 2 (S2)	Task 6	Task 7
	Interviewee 3 (S4)	Task 6	Task 2
	interviewee 4 (S6)	Task 10	Task 7
Group 2 (From Class One)	Interviewee 1 (S5)	Task 9	Task 2
	Interviewee 2 (S6)	Task 3	Task 7
	Interviewee 3 (S8)	Task 6	Task 2
Group 3 (From Class Two)	Interviewee 1 (S5)	Task 2	Task 10
	Interviewee 2 (S3)	Task 9	Task 6
	Interviewee 3 (S7)	Task 7	Task 4
Group 4 (From Class One)	Interviewee 1 (S2)	Task 8	Task 4
	Interviewee 2 (S7)	Task 3	Task 9
	Interviewee 3 (S1)	Task 6	Task 9
	Interviewee 4 (S4)	Task 9	Task 6
	Interviewee 5 (S3)	Task 4	Task 7

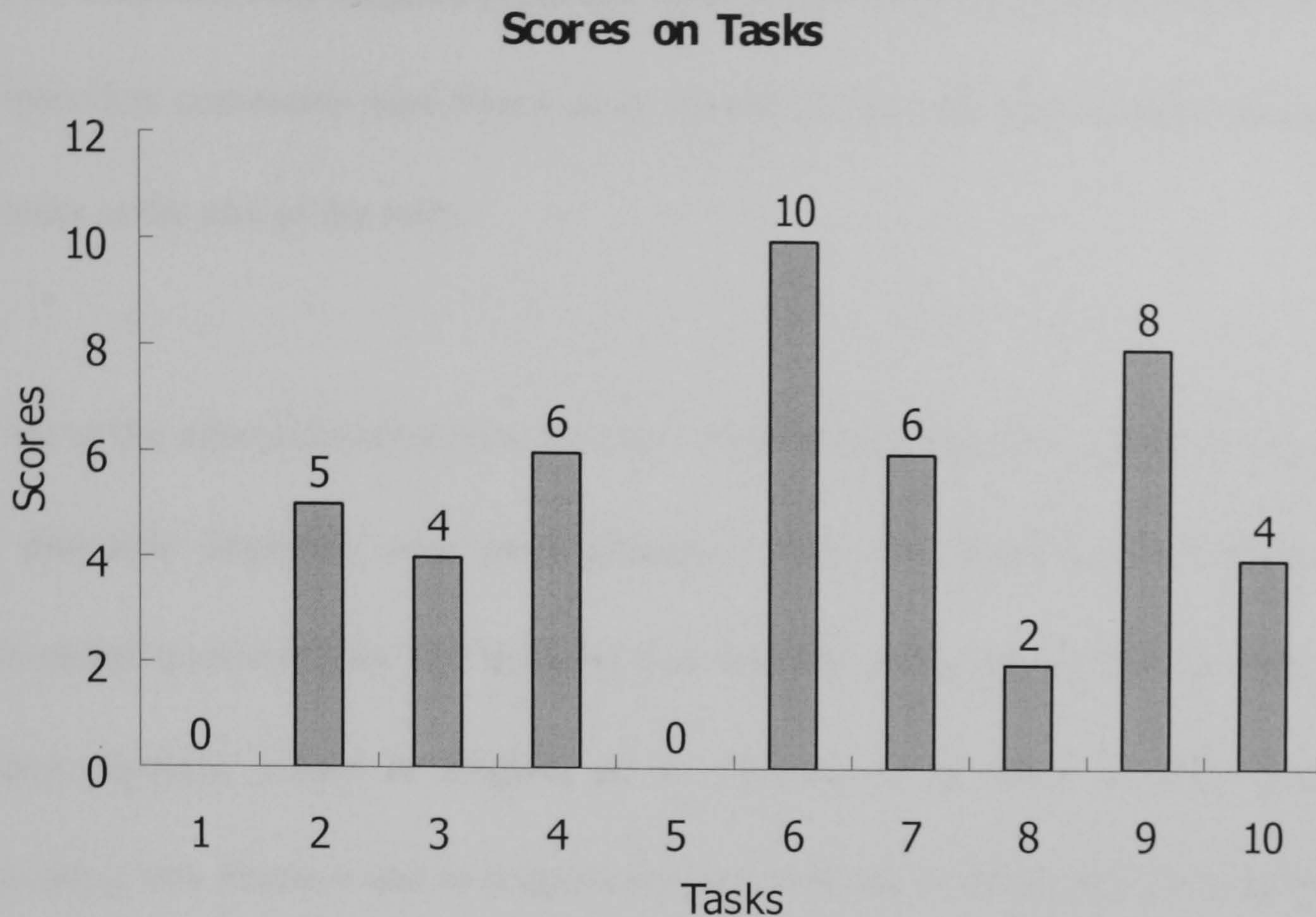
Table 6-1: Voting for tasks during interviews

Notes: tasks

- Task 1: Reading and discussion (Unit 6—Text I)
- Task 2: Discussion—objectives of college education (Unit 7—Text I)
- Task 3: Peer-teaching (Unit 7—Text II)
- Task 4: Problem solving—a controversial sexual picture in Liverpool (Unit 9—Text I)
- Task 5: Compare and contrast—the English and American concepts of space (Unit 1—Text I)
- Task 6: Picture drawing—to illustrate a textbook story (Unit 1—Text II)
- Task 7: Email-writing (Unit 4—Text I)
- Task 8: Discussion—difficulties in English writing (Unit 4—Text I)
- Task 9: Compare and contrast—about Railway System (Unit 3—Text I)
- Task 10: Sharing personal experience—living at home or on campus (Unit 3—Text II)

<sup>4</sup> I have two classes of students and all of them are numbered consecutively. The way of numbering will be explained later.





*Figure 6-1: Interviewees' voting points for tasks*

#### **6.1.1.2 Relevant post-task feedback and interview comments**

From Figure 6-1 above, we can clearly see that the top five tasks are Task 6 (10 points), Task 9 (8 points), Task 4 and 7 (6 points each), and task 2 (5 points). The data related to these five tasks were further organised by putting relevant post-task feedback and interview comments together, since they both basically concern students' opinions on specific tasks. Although the data was collected at two different stages technically, there might not be a clear cut division between them in the sense that both students' feedback in class and comments in the interviews were elicited 'after' the tasks were completed, with the difference being how much 'after' it was—immediately after or some time after. Another implicit difference might be the background or context where the data was collected. Specifically speaking, the



in-class feedback only targeted particular tasks at particular points of the term, while the interview comments were based on an overall comparison and contrast among all the tasks at the end of the term.

Owing to the improvisational changes that I made during the data-collection process, the post-task feedback was only gathered from the attendees by asking an open-ended question, that is, ‘how did you feel about the task?’ The participants’ written answers, either in English or in Chinese, were used to help identify motivating task features and to support my later discussion about task motivation. In addition, the supportive reasons why these five tasks stood out were found in the interviews as well. When organising this data, I divided students’ feedback/comments on each individual task into three groups. The first group is the feedback from those who attended the class regularly and later attended the interviews (named ‘*Interviewees*’). The second group is the feedback from those who regularly attended the class but did not attend the interviews at the evaluation stage (named ‘*Regular Attendees*’). The third group is the feedback from those who did not attend the class regularly but happened to participate in some of the tasks (named ‘*Others*’). For the feedback written in English, I retained the original version. For feedback written in Chinese, I translated them into English and had the translation checked by another Chinese native speaker (who has a Master’s degree obtained in the UK). As the interviews were conducted in Chinese, all the interview data were transcribed, translated and partly proofread by the same Chinese. Samples of the data

organisation are in Appendix 2.

6.1.1.3 A summary of interview questions

During the semi-structured interviews, the questions I asked were slightly different from group to group, according to the actual situation and the interviewees` different responses. Nevertheless, there were a few common questions (see Table 6-2 below) that were discussed in almost all groups:

<p><b>Preliminary questions:</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. When I first mentioned the concept of ‘task’ to you, what was your first impression? What did you think it was like?</li><li>2. After this couple of months’ experience of doing tasks, what do you think it is by now?</li></ol>
<p><b>Main questions regarding various aspects of tasks:</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>3. If I would like you to give marks to these tasks or to re-order them according to your likes, how would you do that? Well you could just pick up a couple of tasks which left you the deepest impression. (Before this question, I showed them a list of all the tasks we did, and briefly explained to them one by one, in order to refresh their memories.)</li><li>4. How do you think of the stage of doing tasks, say, before, while or after studying a text?</li><li>5. What do you think about these two kinds of tasks, text-related ones (comprehension/ understanding tasks) and topic-related ones (opinion tasks)?</li><li>6. I wonder if you sometimes felt your motivation and interest was affected by your nearby environment such as the whole class, the teacher, your peers, your task group, other group members, etc. (How did the participatory structure influence your motivations for doing tasks?)</li></ol>
<p><b>The final general questions:</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>7. During this term, especially this couple of months when we were having class with tasks, have you ever experienced anything that somehow demotivated or discouraged you to hang on in the class? (Unfortunately this question looks similar to Question 6.)</li><li>8. From your point of view as a student, what do you think about this idea (i.e. the three-stage learning), how useful do you think it could be, and could you think of any suggestions for me in order to make this framework better and more realistic?</li></ol>

Table 6-2: Interview questions



The purpose of the above questions was to help my students reflect on the three-stage approach as used throughout the term, to talk about their overall impression of this course, and especially to evaluate all the tasks in a retrospective way. As can be seen from the table, most of the questions are task related, but not specific to any particular task (except No.3). Together with the collated students' feedback and comments on the top five tasks, these data are intended to find out 'motivating task features', based on which 'task motivation' will be explored and discussed as the underlying reason why certain features could motivate students more. Examples of the interviewees' answers to the above questions can be found in Appendix 3.

### **6.1.2 Motivating task features**

In this section, I am going to discuss student' opinions on the following four aspects: task topics, participatory structures, task types, and stage of implementation within the unit. These aspects of task design could explain why certain tasks were perceived more motivating than others. They were mostly discussed retrospectively during the interviews at the 'evaluation' stage. Moreover, some of these aspects were touched upon by the majority of my students anonymously in the earlier 'expectation' stage. At that point, I used their opinions for the task writing purpose.

#### **6.1.2.1 Task topics**

Collecting students' opinions on 'task topics' was the first important thing for me to do at the expectation stage, because it was germane to both the task writing and the

overall lesson planning. Reflecting perhaps the Chinese culture of learning, both teachers and students have been used to depending very much on particular textbooks. In this regard, I have explained that I would use the text topics in the prescribed course book as the topics of my designed tasks. Therefore, the choice of task topics was limited, although I could have certain freedom in deciding how to use the book. What I did was to ask my students to re-arrange the sequence of the units (there are two texts in each unit, with similar topic area) after reading through the table of contents. (There were 14 units in total but I only asked my students to consider the first 11, because according to my previous experience there would not be enough time to finish them all during one term.) Although the titles themselves could offer an indication only of the content of each unit, students still seemed interested to do this re-ordering work because they knew they would study the book at least in a way different from what it was supposed to be. Finally, by means of a point allocation system, we came up with the new sequence in which we would go through the units. In a sense, this sequence indicated students' hierarchical interests in the given task topics, which, more or less, gave me an idea of their task preferences.

As it happened, the preferred sequence chosen by my two classes were not identical. Since I could not reasonably teach the two classes different things in different ways, I integrated their preferences into a single sequence which was slightly different from either of them but followed the general trend of both. However, this new ordering of



units turned out to work only provisionally, and the actual teaching schedule ended up involving some further changes as well. In the following, I present a macro picture of the comparison between the original sequence of units chosen by each class, the provisional compromise sequence, and the actual sequence that we finally followed throughout that term. For the reader's reference, I also include a chart below which shows the final points for each unit based on the two classes' overall opinions:

**Class one:** (Unit) 9—6—7—1—2&3—10—4—8—11—5

**Class two:** (Unit) 6—7—1&4—9—2&3—10—4—8—11—5

**Provisional order:** (Unit) 6—9—7—1—2&3—10—4—8—11—5

**Actual order:** (Unit) 6—7—9—1—2—4—3—10—8

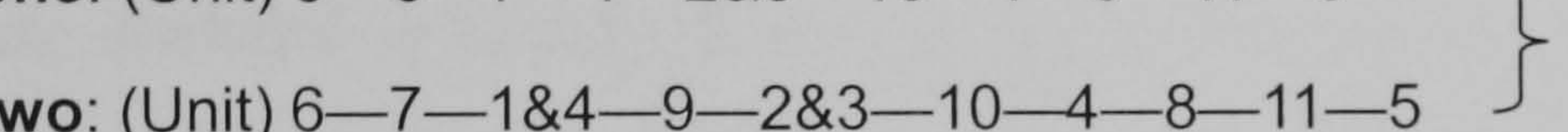


Figure 6-2: Re-ordering the text units

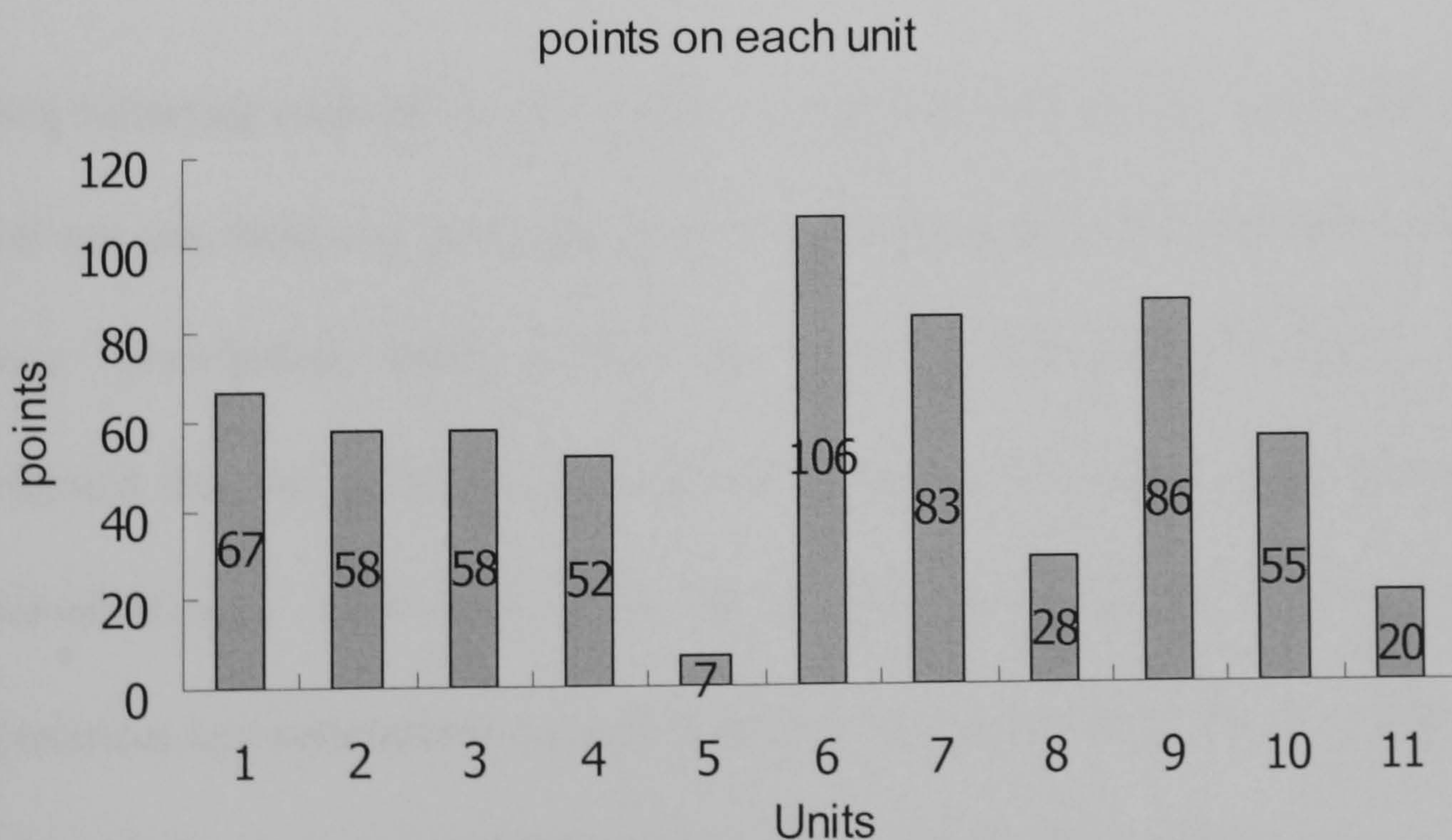


Figure 6-3: Students' voting points for each unit



**Notes: titles of 'Text I' in each unit** <sup>5</sup>

- Unit 1: English and American Concepts of Space
- Unit 2: Tourists
- Unit 3: The Subway
- Unit 4: Style and Purpose
- Unit 5: The Santa Ana
- Unit 6: How to Get Things Done
- Unit 7: The Aims of Education
- Unit 8: Fifth Avenue, Uptown: A Letter from Harlem
- Unit 9: Roots of Freedom
- Unit 10: Fear of Dearth
- Unit 11: Beyond Invalidism

As indicated, students' preferences for the given *text topics* listed above would determine the *task topics* to a great extent. Though the reasons why they came up with these preferred sequences were not explored at the expectation stage, their later comments on the top five tasks explained the implicit criteria by which they evaluated these topics.

When collecting students' written feedback after doing tasks at the 'experience' stage, I did not ask them any particular question regarding how they felt about the task topics. Nevertheless, many of their comments touched upon the topics, which confirmed that this could be an important feature of motivating tasks. During the 'evaluation-stage' interviews, when the interviewees reflected on their on-task experiences and commented on their favourite two tasks, they seemed to appreciate very much the importance of task topics as well. I then summarised a few key words that students commonly used to describe the topics they liked:

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<sup>5</sup> In each unit, Text I is the main text and Text II is a complementary one.

Task topics—students’ comments	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>♦ Interesting</li><li>♦ Attractive</li><li>♦ Enlightening or inspiring</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>♦ Relevant</li><li>♦ Familiar</li><li>♦ Useful</li><li>♦ Authentic/Society-related</li><li>♦ Specific</li><li>♦ Fashionable</li><li>♦ Different</li></ul>

Table 6-3: Key words of students’ comments on preferred task topics

I temporarily grouped students’ comments on task topics into two categories as above in view of their similarity. The first group showed the psychological impact of motivating tasks on learners. The second group indicated the motivating features embedded in the tasks. In other words, my research participants found themselves ‘interested in’, ‘attracted to’ or ‘inspired by’ some tasks because the topics and contents of these tasks were ‘relevant, familiar, useful, authentic, specific, fashionable and different’.

Evidence of these evaluative criteria can also be found in the way students re-ordered the textbook units. It is implied in Figure 6-3 (see above) that the most welcome text titles (e.g. Unit 6, 9, 7, 1) accord with these criteria, whereas the least favoured ones do not (e.g. Unit 5, 11, 8, 4, 10). Among the former group, ‘Unit 6—How to Get Things Done’ seems to aim at teaching students some useful skills; ‘Unit 9—Roots of Freedom’ sounds like a modern and fashionable topic; ‘Unit 7—the Aims of Education’ is something that students are familiar with. In the latter group, however,

‘Unit 11—Beyond Invalidism’ and ‘Unit 10—Fear of Dearth’ contain some uncommonly-used words and abstract concepts which are not easy for students to make sense of; ‘Unit 5—The Santa Ana’ is also something that students are not familiar with, hence the lowest points.

These evaluative criteria for task topics were identified from students’ points of view in their comments. To a great extent, these criteria seem to coincide with the educator/task-designer’s perspectives fairly well. In the academic literature on task-based teaching, it is generally believed that ‘the choice of thematic content’ is ‘a key element in the design of tasks’ (Ellis, 2003: 218). In the case of designing a task-based course for the purpose of general proficiency, Ellis (2003) introduces three guiding principles in the selection of task topics, that is, ‘*topic familiarity*’, ‘*intrinsic interest*’, and ‘*topic relevancy*’ (ibid). These principles are clearly reflected in my students’ topic-evaluation criteria presented in Table 6-3 above. Moreover, Ellis (2003) also reproduces Estaire and Zanon’s (1994) ‘theme generator’ which ‘is organised in terms of thematic areas that are close or remote to the learner’ (2003: 218). According to this generator, task topics could relate to the students themselves (which is the closest area), their family life, school life, social life, and other more abstract things such as fantasy and imagination (which are the most remote areas).

Apart from familiarity, interest, and relevancy, my students’ other comments (see



Table 6-3) on their preferred task topics reflected their other learning and personal needs. For example, some students' preferences for 'enlightening/inspiring' topics showed that they hoped to gain spiritual and intellectual insights into something, as well as to obtain more information and knowledge from the tasks rather than just have fun or learn some language items. Another interesting example was found when I tried to interpret my students' preference for 'different' task topics. At first sight, this criterion seemed to contradict their appreciation of 'familiar' or 'relevant' topics. However, some students' explanation about it during interviews made it clear that this viewpoint could only be understood by taking their previous learning experience into account. By 'different' students meant task topics which they had not experienced before on their courses. They commented that although their teachers changed, often they covered the same topics. As an interviewee said:

'The department changed teachers so frequently and there is no consistency among them at all. Something used by the previous teacher might be used by another teacher again. It is useless repetition. For example, the topic of love has been discussed from year one to year four; and we really have nothing to talk about it any more.' (Interviewee 1, S5, Group 3, translation)

At the same time, teachers and task-designers should understand that not everything 'different' can necessarily motivate students. Their language proficiency, learning background, the difficulty level of tasks and topic familiarity should all be considered. This is why the topics like 'invalidism' and 'Santa Ana' were not rated highly by my students. Although these topics seemed very 'different' and might not have been encountered before, they were too remote from students' familiar topic areas and thus perhaps less appealing.



### 6.1.2.2 Participatory structure

The second aspect which would influence my task design at the expectation stage was in what way my students would like to engage in the tasks. There could be four choices, i.e., *individual work*, *pair work*, *group work*, and *teacher-fronted work*. I explained to my students how these four participatory structures differed and what they meant before asking for their opinions. Based on their past learning experience and expectations of the future, students responded to me with the order of their preferences: pair work—group work—teacher-fronted work—individual work (see Figure 6-4 below). The process of arriving at these preferred participatory structures was the same as that used for ‘re-ordering the Units’ in 6.1.2.1.

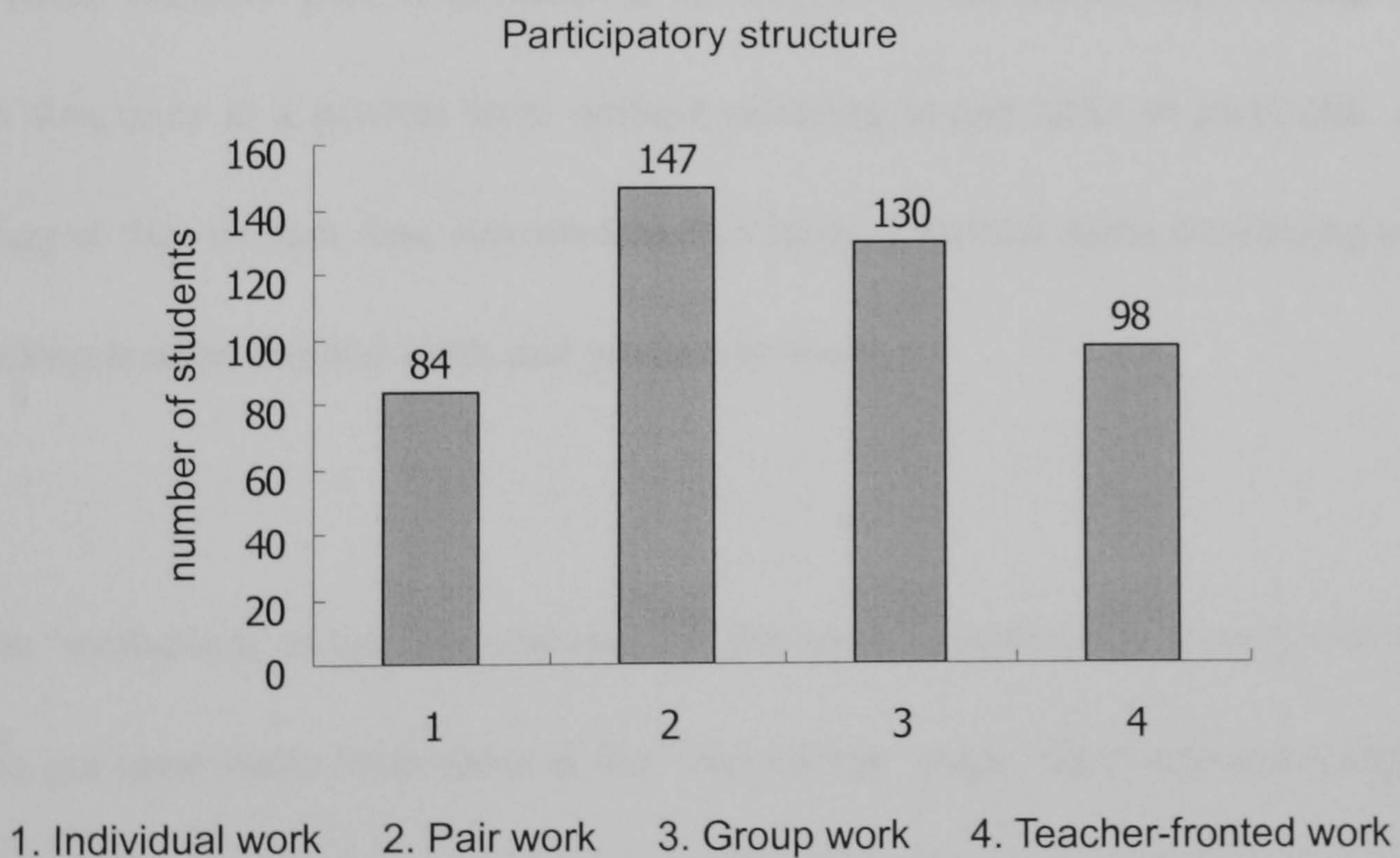


Figure 6-4: Students' voting points for participatory structures

Following students' initial preferences for participatory structures presented above, I further explored how they felt about them after a couple of months' task experience.



During the four group interviews, this issue was discussed either following a more explicit question—‘how did the participatory structure influence your motivations for doing tasks?’, or following a different but relevant question—‘I wonder if you sometimes felt your motivation and interest being affected by your nearby environment such as the whole class, your peers, your task group, and other group members’ (Question 6, Table 6-2).

All four structures were employed in the tasks throughout the ‘experience’ stage, very often in a combined way. That is, some tasks required individual work and pair work, while others required group work and teacher-fronted work. It should be noted that when students gave comments in this regard at interviews, they talked about these structures at a general level without referring to any tasks in particular. After looking at the relevant data surrounding this issue, I spotted some interesting points regarding teacher-fronted work and group/pair work.

At the ‘evaluation’ stage, my students did not seem to appreciate ‘pair/group work’ which got most votes from them at the ‘expectation’ stage. Their extensive negative comments on pair/group work also contradicted some other researchers’ findings which indicated that group discussion was students’ preferred activity in many contexts (e.g. Littlewood and Liu, 1996; Chan, 1995). Ellis (2003) summarises findings which suggest that group/pair work may create the most opportunities for



learners to communicate, and hence increase the quantity of learner speech. However, these two structures did not seem to my students to be the most effective or motivating way to encourage communication. Their reasons were related to the limited knowledge of English and of other things that they had and to the relationship in pairs or small groups. For example, some of my research participants said pair discussion was hard to sustain because the deskmates might be too 'close' (in the sense of close friends) to take any topic seriously. Comparatively, group work was a little better, but at the same time, the problem of 'unequal contribution' (Ellis, 2003) seemed fairly demotivating to many of my participants. In every group, it was always the most able student who talked a lot and in many cases would represent the group to report to the whole class. Whereas other members would, willingly or unwillingly, give up some participating chances even if they were also keen to improve their communication skills in English.

In contrast, my participants seemed to find it more exciting to get the whole class and me involved in a teacher-fronted discussion, with a few volunteers stating their viewpoints freely, although this type of participatory structure is sometimes seen to leave fewer opportunities for students to talk (Ellis, 2003). The advantage my students obviously appreciated was that they could obtain a lot of interesting and inspiring ideas from each other in the teacher-fronted task. As an interviewee said:

'When you listen to others speaking, you will get many new ideas, just like seeing many sparking points here and there....Working with the whole class kept me alert and active' (Interviewee 2, S7, Group 4, translation).

By contrast, students found the pair or group work less motivating or thought-provoking. As a couple of students said:

‘If just two of three of us were talking, I would soon feel bored, and very easily we would start chatting about something else’ (Interviewee 4, S4, Group 4, translation).

‘If it was just a pair of students who had a discussion, the effect might not be so impressive. Even though they two could come up with some inspiring ideas, how could that compare with the ideas of the whole class?’ (Interviewee 3, S8, Group 2, translation).

To further interpret the above comments, it seemed that the teacher-fronted participatory structure might provide a comfortable and less stressful learning environment than pair/group work could offer. Meanwhile, it could also make the learning activity more targeted and focused with the teacher’s lead and management, which in turn would promote more effective learning than pair/group work could. Moreover, my students seemed to appreciate and benefit a lot from their peers’ richer contributions elicited by the teacher within a whole-class context. This finding could greatly support what other researchers have discussed about the advantages of teacher-fronted work (e.g. Ellis, 2003; Nassaji and Wells, 2000). For example, it has often been pointed out that learners push themselves linguistically when talking to teachers. According to my participants, the significance of teacher-prompted peer-talk could outweigh the teacher talk itself. Besides, learning from peers was perceived by some students to be more important than gaining more opportunities of doing talking themselves within small groups.

Another unfavourable factor that group work might have but teacher-fronted work might possibly minimize was about group members. In other words, the composition of the group could be an important factor influencing students' task motivation. On the one hand, some students got less motivated to join the discussion when they became aware that they would not be chosen by their group to be a representative. On the other hand, some students had reservations and hesitations because of feelings of pressure, even if they had the chance to represent their groups. The following two comments from interview Group 2 could well explain their concerns:

'Of course every class has several active students, and unavoidably they are very likely to be the only students who have chances to speak in class. Suppose there was such a top student in a discussion group, other members would naturally think that s/he should be the representative of the group to give a speech. Then there seemed to be no point for others to think hard. Under such circumstance, even if I wanted to say something, I wouldn't have enough confidence to be a volunteer, thinking that others were more capable than me' (Interviewee 1, S5, Group 2, translation).

'I guess I would feel too much pressure if I were chosen to be a representative. You know, you are responsible for the entire group. If you performed well, that would be fantastic. If you didn't, you would have ruined the group's reputation. In view of this, all group members prefer to select the best one on their behalf. For me, if I don't think I'm the best, I will give up the chance. So, you see, this is like a vicious circle—the high achievers get better and the low achievers get worse' (Interviewee 3, S8, Group 2, translation).

This problem relates somewhat to the notion of 'social loafing' which describes the reduction in motivation and effort of people working in groups (Latané, Williams, and Harkins, 1979). According to Latané et al. (1979), this phenomenon can be regarded as a social disease: it is a 'disease' because it has negative consequences which result in 'a reduction in human efficiency'; it is 'social' because it 'results from the presence or actions of other people' (1979: 831). In the classroom context,



this is one of the concerns with group work. In this connection, there are three other concepts which might help explain the underlying reasons for students' social loafing tendency while working in collective settings. The first one is called '*task visibility*' which 'depends on the extent to which the work context permits the monitoring and evaluation of individual performance' (Jones, 1984: 686). Obviously, group work, especially in large-size classes, is not likely to make every individual student's performance observable by the teacher, hence the low visibility. Consequently, this work context may affect individual's motivation and behaviours because it encourages '*free riding*' or '*shirking*' (ibid). That is to say, 'in a group situation in which either individual inputs are indistinguishable or monitoring costs are prohibitive, each individual has a negative incentive to control or minimize production costs (called free riding here) and a positive incentive to supply less effort (called shirking here)' (ibid; cf. Leibowitz and Tollison, 1980).

In the education field, the above three concepts are usually seen as potential problems of certain collective settings such as group work. In this research, some students were also aware of their unsatisfactory performance and the corresponding learning effects within such settings. This might be a reason why my participants did not appreciate group work as much as teacher-fronted work. Though the latter was in a sense a 'bigger' group-work context which was also likely to encourage free riding or shirking, it was after all conducted in a more controlled and visible way by the teacher. In the case of my class, I could easily notice which students responded to the

task more actively and how they performed in a teacher-fronted task situation.

Therefore, the problem of ‘unequal contribution’ (Ellis, 2003) within group work should not be simply attributed to some students’ social loafing tendency. In the present study, since the students themselves (such as the above two interviewees) brought out their concerns in this regard, it implied that they had a good intention to improve the situation. From their comments, we could see that most students were serious about their studies and did not want to avoid making an effort. Unfortunately, their motivation to participate in the tasks was somehow prohibited by some affective factors such as lack of confidence, perception of self-esteem, and fear of responsibility, and by the unfavourable working conditions that some participatory structures offer.

### **6.1.2.3 Positioning tasks at different stages of the reading process**

My students’ attitudes to tasks at different stages of the reading process were elicited only at the final-stage interviews. I did not ask for their preferences for this aspect at earlier stages because it was very situation-specific. I had to consider my overall and specific lesson plans, the schedule of each class, the different purposes of tasks, hence deciding the appropriate time for conducting particular tasks. Basically, I tried to arrange tasks at different stages of my lesson, either before teaching a text (pre-reading), or while teaching a text (while-reading), or after teaching a text (post-reading). In general, all comprehension/understanding tasks went into the

while-reading stage, which corresponded with the predetermined nature of this type of task—to help students make sense of the particular content or language of a given text. The opinion tasks, on the other hand, were found to be more suitable for pre- or post-reading stages, as they aimed to promote students' thinking in a broad sense.

According to the relevant interview data (i.e. discussions about Question 4, Table 6-2), students tended to favour the tasks conducted at the pre-reading stages most. They thought such tasks could well motivate them to study the coming texts, and encourage their thinking since they were more 'open-minded' at that moment. As a student said:

'I think the tasks at the pre-reading stages might be more useful in that they could arouse our curiosity' (Interviewee 2, S6, Group 2, translation).

Similarly, another student commented:

'I think it's better to do tasks at the pre-reading stage, because they may lead us to the text or its theme/topic, which in turn will get us interested to understand the text' (Interviewee 1, S5, Group 3, translation).

In addition, this student also gave a different reason from a 'human' perspective to support his preference. As he said:

'If the task was at the beginning of a class, most students were likely to have high spirits and it should be easy to create an active class atmosphere.' (Interviewee 1, S5, Group 3, translation).

By contrast, all interview groups tended to show their negative attitudes towards the tasks implemented at the post-reading stages, though they were 'opinion tasks' too.



They pointed out two main disadvantages in terms of timing. Firstly they thought doing tasks after studying a text might limit their thinking. As a student said:

‘If we were asked to discuss the relevant topic after studying the text, perhaps our thoughts and languages would be influenced by it, as there might not be much space left for our imagination and exploration’ (Interviewee 3, S7, Group 3, translation).

A similar opinion was:

‘Very likely I couldn’t help thinking about the author’s opinions instead of my own’ (Interviewee 1, S5, Group 2, translation).

The second reason resulted from students’ personal feelings about the timing of tasks. Somehow they felt that the end of my explaining a text was the end of the whole unit, and therefore psychologically they were not prepared to do tasks any more but ready to start a new unit instead. As a student said:

‘When we finished studying a text, we would naturally think that the class was to be over and a new text was coming soon’ (Interviewee 2, S6, Group 2, translation).

A more ‘human’ explanation from Group 3 went as follows:

‘Sometimes when our tasks took place at the second class-period, or especially when it was approaching lunchtime, we might become less patient because we were hungry and everything in our mind was what to eat for lunch’ (Interviewee 1, S5, Group 3, translation).

Apart from the obvious positive or negative attitudes, there were a few critically reflective comments worth mentioning. For example, a student showed her awareness of the usefulness of tasks at the post-reading stages, but at the same time analysed the possible reasons behind most students’ dislikes for the timing. She said:

‘Actually it’s not bad to have a task after studying a text, because at that stage we might be more aware of the purpose and significance of the task, thanks to our understanding of

the text. I think the reason why students seem less interested or patient when doing post-reading task is that too much time spent on the text has already got them tired. What's more, if the class happened to be the last one before lunchtime, then students couldn't wait to be dismissed' (Interviewee 5, S3, Group 4, translation).

In addition, the same student made a further suggestion while confirming her appreciation of tasks in general:

'For me, doing task is very interesting, no matter at what time. In contrast, studying texts is more boring, especially those long and complicated ones. We feel tired and easily go absent-minded. So, I think it's better not to set an obvious line between them. I mean, we'd better combine tasks and texts together rather than turn sharply from a task to a text or vice versa.' (Interviewee 5, S3, Group 4, translation).

Generally speaking, the interview discussion about the issue of 'positioning tasks' focused on whether opinion tasks were better placed in the pre- or post-reading stages of the lesson. Interestingly but not unexpectedly, no one made any comments on the while-reading stage of doing comprehension/understanding tasks. This seemed self evident because this was the only stage when this type of task could be implemented. So students' opinions of these tasks, whether positive or negative, could be solely attributed to the differences in specific task qualities rather than stage of implementation. However, the tasks conducted at the pre- and post-reading stages were all 'opinion tasks', and some of them could even in principle be switched to the opposite stages. For example, Task 2 (i.e. discussion-objectives of college education) and Task 10 (i.e. sharing personal experience—living at home or on campus) were all carried out at the pre-reading stage, but could certainly be moved to the post-reading stage. Similarly, a couple of other tasks could be moved from post- to pre-reading stages as well. Under this consideration, it can be argued that the 'positioning' of

tasks in a class is an important factor which may exert a positive or negative influence on students' task motivation. Being aware of this issue is particularly necessary for teachers in the classroom, that is, they should not only consider what tasks to use, but also carefully decide when to use them. In order to make the appropriate decision, it is important for teachers to understand their students' learning needs, as well as their personal needs for physical and psychological comfort.

#### **6.1.2.4 Task types**

As I mentioned earlier in the thesis, the tasks that I designed and implemented in class could be generally grouped into two types: comprehension/understanding tasks and opinion tasks (see 2.3.3). In other words, the first type of task was *text-related*, aiming to help students make sense of the specific content or language of the given texts; whereas the second type was *topic-related*, aiming to promote students' broad thinking beyond the texts per se. As many of the final task plans were decided at the experience stage, I did not ask for their preferences for text-related versus topic-related task types at the initial expectation stage. Therefore, students' opinions on this aspect were only collected from post-task feedback and final-stage interviews.

##### **6.1.2.4.1 General discussion at interviews**

I will begin with my participants' relevant comments at interviewees, as I found these comments did not refer to any particular tasks but indicated four representative attitudes: 1). *Favouring text-related tasks*. 2). *Favouring topic-related tasks*. 3).



*Neutral attitude.* 4). *Critical attitude.* All responses were prompted by an explicit interview question which was intended to elicit students' opinions about these two types of task (see Question 5, Table 6-2).

**Firstly**, those who favoured text-related tasks stated some reasons which corresponded with the pre-determined purposes of this task type very well. For example, an interviewee said:

'Those tasks closely related to texts may have more direct help to our studies...they can help us analyse and understand the text. They'll also be useful for our exams in the short term' (Interviewee 4, S4, Group 4, translation).

Another one in the same group said:

'When studying the text, I hope to do some particular tasks which could help us understand the text, especially when we come to class with questions' (Interviewee 1, S4, Group 4, translation).

**Secondly**, other students who seemed to attach more value to topic-related tasks gave two major reasons for their preferences. The first one related to its function of helping understanding the text, which was similar to the usefulness of text-related tasks mentioned above. For example, an interviewee in Group 2 said:

'Sometimes we final-year students might be too busy to preview the text before class, so, if we could be given a relevant topic to think about at the beginning of a class, I'm sure it would help us get some background information about what we were going to study' (Interviewee 2, S6, Group 2, translation).

The second reason showed that some students considered this type of task as a way to help them learn something beyond the language. As the following two students

said:

‘I feel the purpose of our attending class is not only to learn some language points or sentence structures, but more importantly, to learn more ideas and get ourselves cultivated and cultured’ (Interviewee 3, S7, Group 3, translation).

‘If we focus too much on the language itself, it will be too boring and not worthwhile at all’ (Interviewee 1, S5, Group 3, translation).

**Thirdly**, a few neutral comments were made by some interviewees as well. They were aware of the different functions of these two task types and tried to stand in the middle of the road without showing any bias. Like an interviewee in Group 1 said:

‘I think these two types should complement each other. We shouldn’t say we prefer which one. I think they both are useful’ (Interviewee 2, S2, Group 1, translation).

A similar viewpoint from Group 2 was:

‘I think both kinds are good. The tasks closely related to text contents could help us with our reading comprehension. The topic-related tasks could give us a macro-picture and promote our thinking’ (Interviewee 2, S6, Group 2, translation).

**Finally**, apart from the dominant positive comments on either or both of the task types, there was one interviewee in Group 4 who made a very critical point:

‘We like the tasks you designed for us as well as your teaching method. But to be frank, I wonder if they are truly useful within our educational context. Even if we understand all these texts thoroughly under the help of your tasks and your explanation, what’s the point? I mean, how much sense can these texts make for our future? What abilities do these texts intend to help us improve if at all?’ (Interviewee 5, S3, Group 4, translation)

Undoubtedly, this is a different voice that we teachers/researchers should hear. At this stage, I am not going to argue whether or not this student’s questioning was reasonable. It was at least good to see that some students did have their own thoughts,

instead of simply saying something that they thought I (as their teacher and a researcher) wanted to hear.

#### **6.1.2.4.2 Specific task evaluation and post-task feedback**

Following up the above general discussion, I turned to look at more supportive evidence in relation to particular tasks. Plenty of evidence was found from the interviewees' explanation about why they favoured certain tasks most, though 'task type' was not an explicit focus in their comments. Similarly, when writing up the post-task feedback in class, students (including interviewees and other attendees) were not directed to comment on this particular point either. However, their open-ended comments did demonstrate their understandings of different task types as well as how they found them helpful and useful.

By putting all relevant data together and dividing them into two groups according to the two task types (i.e. 'comprehension/understanding tasks' and 'opinion tasks'), I came up with the following table (Table 6-4) which summarised all possible reasons why certain tasks, to be specific, the 'top five' tasks, were perceived to be motivating by the research participants. Only the key words are included in the table; further detailed explanation and examples will be provided afterwards.



Comprehension/understanding tasks
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>◆ Help understanding the text</li><li>◆ Effective way of learning the text</li><li>◆ Turn abstract conceptions into concrete images</li><li>◆ Cognitively demanding/challenging</li><li>◆ New /interesting /unconventional way of learning English</li></ul>
Opinion tasks
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>◆ Effectiveness of visual aids (e.g. pictures)</li><li>◆ Extra relevant materials help understand the text</li><li>◆ Getting interested to learn the text</li><li>◆ English learning/practising (e.g. speaking, writing...)</li><li>◆ Unconventional way of learning English</li><li>◆ Participation/communication</li><li>◆ Warm-up</li><li>◆ Practical/useful</li><li>◆ Western/other countries' knowledge/culture/customs</li><li>◆ Related to life/society</li><li>◆ Curiosity about the outside world, about things outside of textbook</li><li>◆ Opinion exchange/sharing, learning others' thoughts/ideas</li><li>◆ Broaden horizon, enrich knowledge</li><li>◆ Intriguing/ inspiring/eye-opening/enlightening</li><li>◆ Initiatives</li><li>◆ Cognitive development (thinking, analysing...)</li><li>◆ Self-perception</li><li>◆ Dream of going abroad</li><li>◆ Enjoyable/relaxing/less pressure</li><li>◆ Fashionable task topic, suitable for young people's taste</li><li>◆ Draw attention, attractive</li><li>◆ Make class atmosphere active</li></ul>

Table 6-4: Initial analysis of task feedback

As only one ‘comprehension/understanding’ task ranked in the top five, and the rest of the ‘top five’ tasks were all ‘opinion tasks’, there were significantly more comments made on the latter task type (see the lower section of the above table) than on the former type (see the upper section). There were some overlaps among these points, and I listed them all there for the purpose of further analysis and

categorisation. Seeing them as a whole, I found the students' viewpoints covered a wide range of perspectives, from educational to personal, from linguistic to psychological. Some points were particularly related to the specific tasks or the way of learning English, whereas others touched upon students' lifelong goals or their desire to enlarge their world view. Therefore, it might be important not to limit my understanding of students' opinions by seeing them only as language learners within the classroom, though this was a key perspective. It should also be necessary to respect them as human beings living in the real world and try to understand how they saw the values of tasks from a holistic perspective.

So far I have reported the initial investigation of motivating task features (i.e. task topics, participatory structure, stage of implementing tasks, and task types), among which 'task type' was in a sense the 'hard core', because all the relevant comments on the top five tasks were arranged around it (e.g. see Table 6-4). This established an important basis for the rest of the discussion in this chapter. From the following section, I shall further explore the reasons underlying students' task motivation from various angles. In other words, I shall analyse the motivational perceptions which shape students' attitudes towards the various tasks that they experienced.

### **6.1.3 Task motivation**

Based on the initial analysis of the data presented in the previous sections, I further teased out the underpinning themes and the relevant theoretical dimensions for

discussion, which are presented in the following table. The identification of these themes was also based on my supervisor’s coding of some sample data. In general, there are three major aspects to students’ motivational perceptions of task values/effectiveness, that is, *language acquisition and learning*, *broader cognitive goals and skills*, and *learner satisfaction*.

<b>Language acquisition and learning</b>	<b>Studying texts in particular</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>◆ Effective way of studying the text</li><li>◆ Effectiveness of visual aids (e.g. pictures)</li><li>◆ Turn abstract conceptions into concrete images</li><li>◆ Getting interested to learn the text, warming-up</li><li>◆ Curiosity</li></ul> <b>Learning English in general</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>◆ Western/other countries’ knowledge/culture/customs</li><li>◆ New/interesting/unconventional way of learning English</li><li>◆ English learning and skills practising (e.g. speaking, writing...)</li><li>◆ Participation/communication</li><li>◆ Practical/useful</li></ul>
<b>Broader cognitive goals and skills</b>	<b>Knowledge enhancement</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>◆ Curiosity about the outside world, about things outside of textbook</li><li>◆ Broaden horizon, enrich knowledge</li><li>◆ Intriguing/ inspiring/eye-opening/enlightening</li></ul> <b>Mutual development</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>◆ Opinion exchange/sharing, learning others’ thoughts/ideas</li></ul> <b>Self-improvement</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>◆ Initiatives</li><li>◆ Self-perception</li><li>◆ Cognitive development (thinking, analysing...)</li></ul>
<b>learner satisfaction</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>◆ Enjoyment/relaxation/less pressure</li><li>◆ Related to personal life or society</li><li>◆ Fashionable topic, suitable for young people’s taste</li><li>◆ Make class atmosphere active</li></ul>

Table 6-5: Further categorisation of task feedback



### **6.1.3.1 Language acquisition and learning**

For learners in the language classroom, no matter at what level, improving the target language proficiency should be, and is expected to be one of their primary learning aims. As an English teacher, my responsibility is to help them work towards this aim in effective ways. Certainly, learning a foreign language is a difficult business which involves comprehensive proficiency development such as enlarging vocabulary, learning grammar, reinforcing communicative skills, and getting to know the relevant culture. For language learners at different developmental stages in different learning contexts, perhaps their expectations of their English learning experience are different, hence the different evaluation of the effects of various learning activities.

From a teacher's perspective in this research, since the course I taught was 'Advanced English Reading', I decided that one of my main purposes of designing and implementing certain tasks was to help students understand the reading texts in the prescribed textbook. Regarding how my students interpreted my teaching aims, I was glad to see that they did mention some task values in this aspect. This is particularly true when they talked about 'comprehension/understanding' tasks which by nature were designed for this purpose. About 'opinion' tasks, though they might not be directly related to the contents of texts, students still noted the usefulness of the activities surrounding the relevant topics. Therefore, some of their comments on this type of task look similar to those on the former type as well.

**Firstly**, some of the students' comments were very 'task-specific'. That is to say, the comments resulted from their appreciation of the quality of a particular task. Therefore, I need to refer to the task in question before trying to make any interpretation. For example, the 'picture-drawing' task (Task 6, Appendix 1) ranked first among all the tasks, and it was the only task that involved some drawing activity. I designed this task because I felt it would be difficult for students to make sense of that particular paragraph (this paragraph is included in Appendix 1, Task 6), and therefore wanted to try out this way of driving home the meaning. Some students saw it as effective in the sense that it helped them understand the text content. As they commented, 'I feel I can understand that article after drawing'; 'It makes the abstract description into concrete pictures, very effective'; 'Drawing produces different effects'; 'Pictures can give more intuitive impression, and the text becomes easier to understand.'

Apart from seeing this straightforward function, some students realised the cognitive and pragmatic challenge embedded in this task. An interviewee in Group 2 made an interesting suggestion as follows:

'That is a re-creative process. If this task was a part of an examination, I'm sure it would be more effective in testing students' abilities rather than the silly book knowledge' (Interviewee 3, S8, Group 2, translation).

Another interviewee in Group 4 had a similar voice:

'It attracts our attention; we need to use our head and hand, knowledge and imagination' (Interviewee 3, S1, Group 4, translation).

This couple of opinions implied that students were aware of the difference between ‘knowledge’ and ‘ability’, and they were keen to improve their transferable skills even in the process of learning a language. Thus, this could be an important value that some learners expected to see from motivating tasks. Moreover, students’ appreciation of this task also showed the positive effects of ‘optimal degree of challenge’ that a task may have. In Williams and Burden’s (1997) framework of L2 motivation (see Table 3-3), this is an important internal factor that may get a learner intrinsically interested in the task.

Alongside the above linguistic and cognitive values, some of my research participants saw this task as motivating because it demonstrated an unconventional way of learning English and aroused their curiosity. As an interviewee in Group 4 said:

‘We hardly have chances to learn English by means of drawing, especially when taking the boring intensive reading course. It’s really new and fresh to us’ (Interviewee 3, S1, Group 4, translation).

Another student said:

‘The textbook is very boring, you know, and the lines of words make us unwilling to read it at all. But when you assigned a drawing task to us, I suddenly became interested to read that paragraph. I was curious about what kind of pictures we could come up with.’ (Interviewee 4, S4, Group 4, translation)

Certainly, having fun should not be encouraged as students’ main aim in the classroom. However, this point should always be taken into account by teachers and task designers. If learners were not interested in a task at all, it might be hard for



them to appreciate its other values no matter how potentially useful this task was in principle. In this regard, ‘intrinsic value’ is considered as one of the four major components of task value proposed by Eccles et al. (1983; reviewed in 3.3.1.2). That is, students would like to gain some enjoyment from doing a task. Moreover, in Keller’s (1983) education-oriented theory of motivation, ‘interest’ is also seen as important in arousing and sustaining learners’ curiosity, which is one of the sources of their feelings of ‘satisfaction’ (reviewed in 3.3.2.1).

**Secondly**, some other comments were ‘non-task-specific’. In other words, when some students commented on a certain task, they were actually taking a broad view of their English learning rather than focusing on the skills needed to accomplish a particular task. Apart from getting to understand the given texts and improving reading skills, students were also aware of the importance of learning about foreign cultures, and appreciated the opportunities to develop other language skills apart from reading. These aspects were more obvious to see when they commented on the ‘opinion tasks’ which particularly aimed to encourage communication and interaction via English. As a student wrote in his task feedback:

‘This kind of discussion helps us to talk around a certain topic, thus it is helpful, especially for oral English....It motivates me to think in English’ (S5, Class Two, original).

Another student’s comments indicated her understanding of the relationship between language and its relevant culture, though she did not stress her own interest in this

aspect:

‘It is helpful for us who want to have a good command of English. We are required to know about foreign conventions. In this way, we will have more interest in studying English’ (S10, Class Two, original).

In connection with students’ learning goals in this aspect, ‘relevance’, as one of the major determinants of motivation, might be a criterion that they used for evaluating tasks (Keller, 1983; Crookes and Schmidt, 1991; reviewed in 3.3.2.1)

It was not a surprise to see the positive attitudes towards English culture among my participants, but it was indeed interesting to know that they had fairly high expectation of the way in which the cultural knowledge was transferred to them. Tasks could be a good means in this regard, but the task implementer (e.g. teacher) seemed to be more important. As far as the present research is concerned, I myself was the task designer and teacher conducting the tasks. The entire process of writing and implementing tasks was unavoidably influenced by my personal living and studying experience in the UK. My students tended to be more interested in me and my overseas life than in the tasks per se; and they would see me as a window to the western world. In this sense, the teacher, as a ‘significant other’ (Williams and Burden, 1997, see Table 3-3) is an important external factor in activating students’ intrinsic interest and helping to maintain their positive attitudes to English.

In general, my participants’ comments discussed in this subsection (i.e. 6.1.3.1) all

had much to do with the effectiveness of the task as a means of learning English. Moreover, this ‘learning’ could be understood in a broad sense, including learning to understand a reading text, learning to develop language skills, and learning to improve cognitive ability in language acquisition. Connecting these aspects of learning with learners’ goals, it could be seen that these goals relate not only to language education but also to personal development. Actually, this corresponds with Winne and Marx’s (1989; reviewed in 3.2.3.2) definition of ‘tasks’ from a goal perspective, that is, ‘tasks are the events of classroom life that constitute opportunities for students to engage their cognitive and motivational apparatus in the service of achieving *personal* and *educational* goals’ (1989: 242). Therefore, in the following subsection, I am going to go beyond the investigation of students’ language-learning-level motivational consideration, and further explore some broader aspects in relation to task motivation.

### **6.1.3.2 Broader cognitive goals and skills**

When evaluating task values and effectiveness, my students also expressed, implicitly or explicitly, their desire for knowledge enhancement and intellectual development, as well as interests in meeting cognitive challenges in doing tasks. Basically, these desires and interests reflected students’ broader cognitive goals and needs for developing relevant skills, as opposed to linguistic goals and skills.

**Firstly**, some students found certain tasks motivating because these tasks could



satisfy their ‘curiosity about the outside world and about things outside the textbook’. Other students used words like ‘broaden horizon’, ‘enrich knowledge’, and ‘eye-opening’ to express similar feelings. Interestingly, the comments of this kind seemed to have little to do with language acquisition, though they arose from doing learning tasks in English classes. For example, when commenting on Task 9 (about railway systems, see Appendix 1), one student’s written feedback was:

‘Our teacher told us about the English railway station and it broaden our eyesight and made us learn about some very interesting and useful knowledge’ (S12, Class Two, original).

Similarly, another student wrote:

‘As English majors or not, to know about the outside world is what we desire, because it can enlarge our vision of the world. What’s more, I think to know more about the other country’s culture is a necessity’ (S24, Class Two, original).

Indeed, learning about the relevant ‘culture’ is important for learning the target language, as I have discussed in the previous subsection regarding learners’ motivation for language learning. However, I had an impression that students’ interests were not limited to the culture of English-speaking countries. The concept of ‘outside world’ in their minds might actually refer to anywhere outside the classroom, outside the university, or outside China. Referring to Gardner’s (1985, reviewed in 3.2.1) distinction between ‘integrative’ and ‘instrumental’ orientation/motivation, I felt that my students’ interests of this kind did not really fall into either category, because they neither had a clear intention to identify with certain foreign language community nor had an explicit utilitarian reason for learning the foreign culture. Rather, students seemed to be more concerned about their overall

personal development and keen to grow into knowledgeable and broadly educated persons.

The **second** interesting point is that some students were motivated about the tasks which allowed them to learn from each other. Compared with the first point discussed above which implied that students saw their teacher as a window to the outside world and as a source of knowledge, the second one showed that they also saw their peers as valuable learning sources who could not only bring many fresh ideas to them but also activate their own thinking. Moreover, both points could help explain why my students had an obvious preference for ‘teacher-fronted’ participatory structure. Perhaps in that setting, they felt they could have more chances to ‘communicate’, verbally or mentally, with the teacher and other class fellows.

In a sense, the intrinsic nature of communicative tasks predetermines the opportunities for classroom interaction. However, from students’ perspective, what they themselves expected to learn and develop through tasks might vary from one to another. Though the tasks were designed to facilitate language learning, some students did not really attach much importance to this aspect. Instead, they appreciated the chances to learn others’ thoughts/ideas/opinions about certain topics, even if these thoughts were not expressed in perfect English by their peers. In other

words, they were more concerned about ‘meaning’ than ‘form’; and sometimes they even seemed more eager to listen to others’ opinions than to spell out their own. In this connection, some students used the words like ‘intriguing’, ‘inspiring’, ‘enlightening’ when reflecting on the task-engagement processes that they were motivated about. For example, when talking about Task 2 (about ‘objectives of college education, see Appendix 1) at interviews, a student said:

‘At the beginning of that task, you know, when we were doing brainstorming, I found myself blinkered. After you put all the ideas on the blackboard, I realised there were actually so many aims among us, which suddenly opened my eyes. Some of them might never occur to me at all’ (Interviewee 1, S5, Group 2, translation).

In addition, some students’ written feedback on this task expressed similar opinions. For example, ‘Two heads are better than one, they can tell many ideas that I didn’t think’ (S17, Class One, original); ‘...discussing with your partners and exchanging your opinions through which we can learn something’ (S6, Class One, original); ‘the brainstorming and the presentation...the first one gives me more thoughts, while the latter one helps me further understand others’ opinions’ (S15, Class One, original). From the above comments, it could be argued that these students were in a sense ‘intrinsically motivated’ by the task, though this did not necessarily mean they had fun. As reviewed in 3.2.2.1, Ryan and Deci (2000) point out the existence of intrinsic motivation ‘in the nexus between a person and a task’ (2000, 56). They further explain this ‘in terms of the satisfaction a person gains from intrinsically motivated task engagement’ based on Hull’s (1943) ‘learning theory’ (ibid). In the case of the present study, it seemed that intrinsic motivation could also be interpreted in terms of



the satisfaction a person gains from beneficial interaction with other task-takers while engaging in a task.

**Thirdly**, some students seemed keen to improve their cognitive ability such as thinking and analysing, as well as to develop their self-perception of competence through working on tasks. In addition, some tasks were seen as motivating because they encouraged students to take initiatives. In general, students' such comments indicated their strong desire for exercising their personal capacities in various ways. One good example of tasks which may have satisfied their learning needs in this regard is Task 7 (about email writing, see Appendix 1). As an interviewee commented:

‘Our usual way of learning is from theory to practice, but this task showed the other way round. It encouraged us to take our initiatives and aroused our interest’ (Interviewee 5, S3, Group 4, translation).

The following comment from another student's written feedback showed her increased understanding of herself as a language learner:

‘When I was asked to write an email in the class, I really didn't know how to start it. I have been having my English writing classes for almost six semesters. I am a good copier but not a good originator. I used to writing an email or business letter or something like this with a sample beside me. However, when I need to write it myself, I couldn't find the proper words or sentences. Even I know such tone was not appropriate, I would use it, because I don't know other expressions. I think it is not quite difficult for me. What I need very much is the practice. I am confident in writing a good email.’ (S5, Class One, Original)

Another example of tasks which may have promoted students' cognitive

enhancement is Task 4 (discussion about freedom, regarding a sexual picture, see Appendix 1). For instance, a student wrote her feedback like this:

‘This task is very useful...it does cause students to think seriously and try to find out a solution to the problem. Therefore, it is helpful to improve the students’ independent thinking ability’ (S2, Class Two, original).

Similarly, another student commented as follows:

‘...we put our thinking in the pathway to discovering what freedom is. So it is intriguing....This kind of problem-solving task trains our mental ability, such as analysing, synthesising, and the like’ (S8, Class Two, original).

Generally, the above four quoted comments all showed students’ appreciation of developing their cognitive competence through tasks. It is important for students to have a ‘realistic awareness of personal strengths and weaknesses’, a positive attitude towards certain degree of challenge, as well as confidence in fulfilling one’s potential (Williams and Burden, 1997, see Table 3-3). These are important internal factors which can influence one’s motivation to do something. Moreover, students’ willingness to take initiatives and to develop independent thinking is an important prerequisite to encourage learner autonomy as well. Connecting this aspect with my students’ comments on the stage of implementing tasks discussed earlier, we could further understand why they preferred to do tasks at the pre-reading stages. As they explained, they would be more likely to think freely, actively, and independently at that point.

All in all, the above three points could be considered as the second source of task

motivation. They imply that motivating tasks should demonstrate cognitive effectiveness to satisfy students' needs in this aspect. Certainly, students' broader cognitive goals and their needs for all-round personal development could coexist with language learning goals. On the one hand, broader goals and needs may sometimes compete with language learning motivation and direct learners' attention and efforts in different ways. But on the other hand, they can also be complementary and positively push learners' language learning motivation forward.

### **6.1.3.3 Learner satisfaction**

Apart from linguistic and cognitive considerations, psychological effectiveness of tasks (in the shape of 'learner satisfaction') was also identified as an underlying source of task motivation in this study. Based on Keller's (1983) motivation system, 'satisfaction' has been discussed by Dörnyei (1994) as one of the four course-specific motives (reviewed in 3.3.2.1). According to Dörnyei, this component refers to 'the combination of extrinsic rewards such as praise or good marks and to intrinsic rewards such as enjoyment and pride' (1994: 278). In the present study, satisfaction could also help explain learners' task-specific motives, but it seemed to be more complex than what Dörnyei has discussed.

**Firstly**, learner satisfaction had nothing to do with 'good marks', as the tasks I employed in my class were not for any assessment purpose. Things like 'praise' or 'pride' were never mentioned by my participants either. 'Enjoyment' could be a



reason, as some students did say that some tasks were interesting and they enjoyed them. In addition, this ‘enjoyment’ did not necessarily arise from having fun. It also came from the feeling of relaxation while studying in an active but less stressful class atmosphere. For example, when commenting on Task 9 (about railway system, see Appendix 1), one student wrote:

‘The relevant discussion makes class more attractive. I’m very happy that I have chance to know something about Britain in this way. It gave me an impression that it is a relaxation to have such kind of class. Now I haven’t any pressure such as memorising long words, analysing complex sentences or paragraphs etc. in the intensive reading class. But I actually have learned something’ (S20, Class One, original).

**Secondly**, it was found in the present study that learner satisfaction did not just mean pleasure or contentment derived from engaging in a task. Learner satisfaction was fairly germane to the previously discussed linguistic and cognitive needs that they expected to fulfil in the task. In other words, apart from having fun or feeling good, some students were also seriously concerned with gaining language-learning-related skills or knowledge, and with enhancing their rounded self-improvement beyond learning English. Furthermore, this aspect of learner satisfaction could relate to the ‘basic psychological needs’ which underpin intrinsic motivation. As reviewed in 3.2.2.1, Deci and Ryan (2002) point out that humans have innate needs for ‘relatedness’, ‘competence’, and ‘autonomy’ (2002: 7-8). This is true for learners in the classroom as well. In this research, my earlier quoted comments indicated that some of my participants felt satisfied when they could learn from their fellows in the teacher-fronted tasks, when they experienced opportunities to exercise their capacities, and when they were encouraged to take initiatives and to engage in

independent thinking.

**Last but not least**, learner satisfaction also came from their physical and psychological comfort while doing tasks or other learning activities in the classroom.

Williams and Burden's (1997) framework includes this point as one of the external factors that influence student motivation (see Table 3-3). With regard to the present study, clear evidence which supported this aspect was my participants' comments on the stage of implementing tasks. As I have discussed, one of the reasons why they favoured the pre-reading stage of doing tasks was that these tasks were mostly conducted at earlier points of the class/day when they had 'high spirits'. By contrast, if a task took place at the ending phase of a class or in the late morning, students were likely to be impatient, and physically they might feel hungry as well.

All in all, there are a variety of factors that might affect learner satisfaction with the teacher, the class, the tasks, their peers, and with themselves. As regards tasks in particular, learner satisfaction is an important part of task motivation. On the one hand, such satisfaction seems to be heavily dependent on the linguistic and cognitive effectiveness of the task. On the other hand, learners' psychological (such as having enjoyment or relaxation) and physical comfort are fairly important as they could help create a favourable classroom atmosphere to facilitate language acquisition and cognitive development.

## 6.2 Further discussion

### 6.2.1 Underlying dimensions of task motivation

Following up the discussion in 6.1.3, the three emergent themes (i.e. ‘language acquisition and learning’, ‘broader cognitive goals and skills’, and ‘learner satisfaction’) seem to indicate three underlying motivational dimensions which work interactively to influence learners’ task motivation. Specifically speaking, ‘*academic motivation*’ may well explain learners’ purpose for language acquisition and learning in general; ‘*personal development motivation*’ explains why they are keen to develop other knowledge and skills beyond English; ‘*affective motivation*’ reminds us of the emotional satisfaction that learners need while doing tasks.

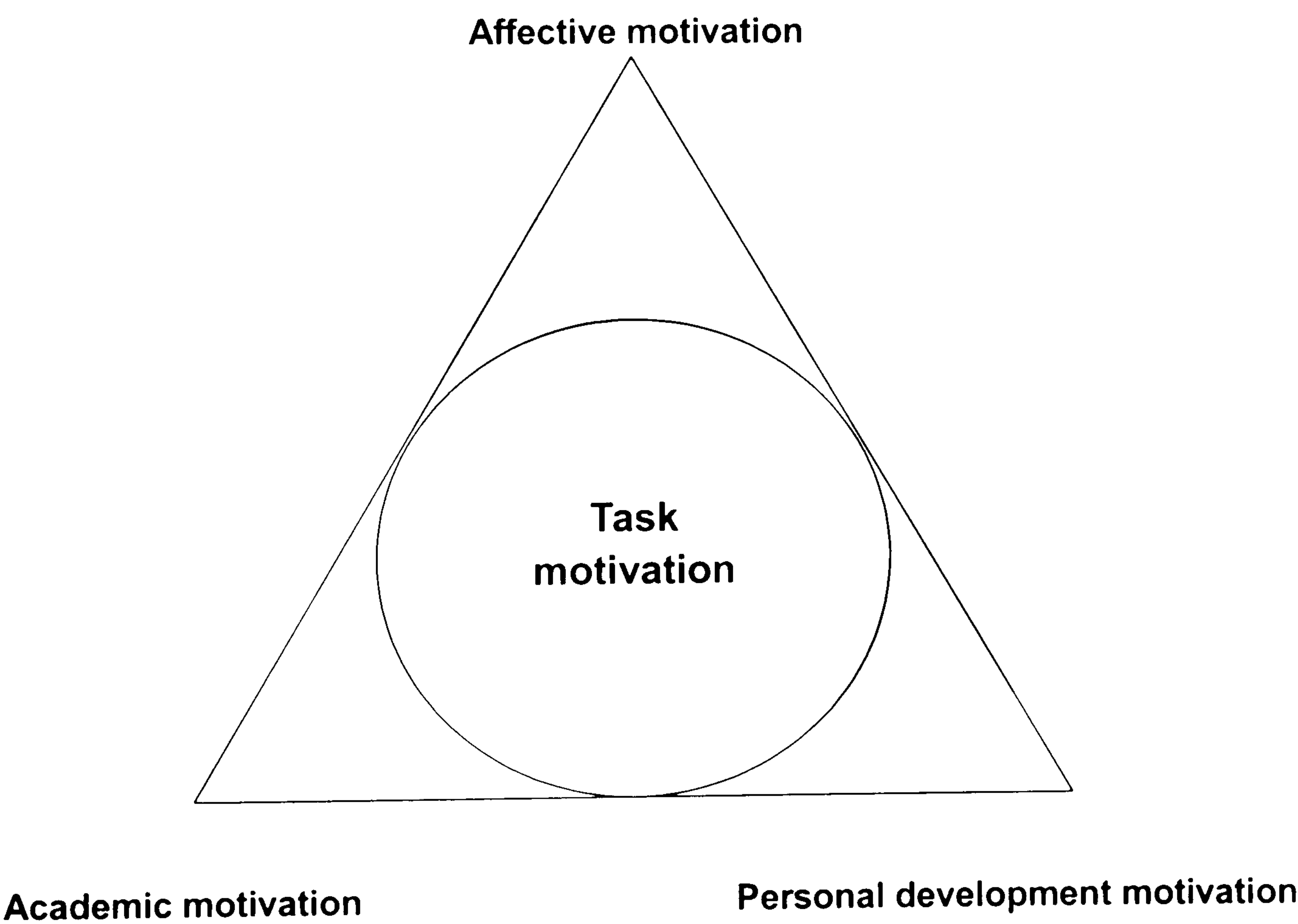


Figure 6-5: Task motivation



### 6.2.1.1 Academic motivation

Within classroom contexts, student motivation is generally seen as ‘the product of a complex set of interacting goals and intentions of both *academic* and *social* nature’ (Dörnyei, 2005: 86; cf. Juvonen and Nishina, 1997; Wentzel, 1999). Regarding the academic nature of student motivation, Dörnyei sees it as ‘...—hopefully—an important facet of the learners’ general disposition toward attending school...’ (2005: 86). This ‘general disposition’ may vary from student to student due to their different personal goals and learning needs. In view that all participants in my research context were English majors, and around 80% of their modules were English related, I would presume that their main academic motivation stemmed from their different reasons for learning English. For example, some students planned to further their academic pursuits still in this field (i.e. to read for a Master’s degree majoring in English); some students wanted to change their majors for further studies but English would be a compulsory subject among the postgraduate entrance exams; some students needed to strive for various language certificates for job-seeking purposes; and all the students would have to prepare for the national English test. These different goals for learning English in the situation would have definitely influenced my participants’ judgement of various task values (such as the importance, usefulness, and relevance). Accordingly, from students’ preferences for certain task features, we might get to understand their academic motivation as well.

To begin with, my participants' voices on 'task types' can reflect their academic motivation in terms of learning English. From their comments on 'comprehension/understanding tasks', it could be seen that students attached great importance to being able to understand the reading texts. They seemed to agree with the course requirement though they felt bored with the prescribed course book. Naturally, they would be happy if the teacher could bring some 'unconventional' methods (such as tasks) to the class and reduce the boredom. That the drawing task (see Task 6, Appendix 1) ranked first was good evidence in this regard, although it was just a one-off activity.

Apart from getting to understand particular texts, some students would also take advantage of tasks to improve their English proficiency in general. Students' academic motivation influenced their appreciation of two main benefits that the tasks demonstrated, that is, chances for *knowledge gaining* and *skills practising*. I group these two aspects under the umbrella of 'academic motivation' in view of their close relationship with language learning. 'Knowledge' here mainly refers to the cultural information about relevant English-speaking countries, which in students' minds is important for language acquisition. 'Skills' refer to comprehensive language skills including English reading, writing, listening, and speaking. Referring back to Williams and Burden's (1997) framework, these two aspects correspond to certain internal factors. Expectations for gaining relevant knowledge might clearly reflect my participants' attitudes 'to the target language', and 'to the target language

community and culture’, while the wishes for ‘skills practising’ demonstrated their ‘awareness of developing skill and mastery in a chosen area’ as well as their attitudes to ‘language learning in general’ (see Table 3-3).

#### 6.2.1.2 Personal development motivation

Besides ‘academic motivation’, another salient theme emerged from the data, that is, students’ keen interests in *seeking broader knowledge and cognitive development*.

Though my research participants were all English majors, the data did reveal other personal development goals which, as I discussed earlier, could compete with or complement their language learning goals. When discussing academic motivation above, I have mentioned learners’ interests in knowledge about western culture and community. Actually, the desired knowledge of this kind seemed to be getting further and further away from language learning in a strict sense; and the so-called ‘western culture/community’ might as well represent the whole world outside the classroom. In students’ words, they were expecting to ‘broaden their horizon’ and ‘enrich their knowledge’ through the given academic tasks in class. Meanwhile, they would like to develop their cognitive competence such as thinking and analysing, and other transferable skills such as taking initiatives and making decisions.

I was not surprised at students’ learning needs in this aspect, but did not expect they would have such strong motivations to explore the broader knowledge and views from others, and to develop their own thinking potential. The fact that four out of the



top five tasks voted by interviewees were ‘opinion tasks’ could be good evidence which showed students’ appreciation of the non-linguistic knowledge they had gained and the various thoughts they had shared among themselves. Interestingly, when they talked positively about such opinion-exchange activities, they did not mention any issues of their peers’ language at all. No one seemed to care much about whether their classmates could speak fluent and accurate English when expressing their thoughts. Rather, they were just happy enough so long as they could obtain some ‘ideas’ from each other. As it happened during the fieldwork, there was always a whole-class discussion/review part involved at some point of the tasks, no matter what participatory structure was mainly employed. My participants seemed to value this part very much, because they saw it as a chance to absorb more ideas from me and the whole class, which perhaps was rare in other English courses.

Realising this motivational dimension also triggered me to find out its sources. As I myself am from the same cultural/social background as my research participants, it might be necessary to look for answers from a cultural/social perspective first. Despite the dominant ‘exam-oriented’ educational system for quite a few years in China, the current central education authorities and even the whole society have been advocating ‘quality education’ at all levels (Ministry of Education, 2001, 2003; cited in Jin and Cortazzi, 2006: 14). Students’ awareness of its importance becomes clearer as they go through advancing ‘developmental stages’ (Williams and Burden, 1997) as well. In this regard, university students tend to feel more urgently the need to grow

into ‘all-round’ persons by getting education in a broad sense, as they will soon enter the society which may judge them through their transferable skills and comprehensive knowledge rather than through exam results only. All these factors might push students to consciously internalise the initially external values and expectations, which might be an underlying reason for their ‘personal development motivation’.

In addition, once personal development motivation has been ‘internalised’, it gets very close to ‘intrinsic motivation’, which is seen to be an ideal state of learning (Deci and Ryan, 2002). Having this internal force is a good start, but how to keep it going and protect it becomes crucially important. At this point, the most immediate learning environment (Dörnyei, 2003), e.g. the classroom, the teacher, the peers, may play a decisive role which either pushes learners forward to the ‘intrinsic motivation’ end or pulls them back to the ‘amotivation’ end (Deci and Ryan, 2002; see Table 3-1). When unfortunately the external force does not work well, the learners may have some internal ‘fights’, and then make alternative decisions to maintain their internalised aims by themselves. For example, when a learner’s confidence and willingness to participate in a task confronts peer pressure within his task group, he may choose a different way of taking part. Normally learners’ engagement or participation in a task is measured by some observable behaviour such as speaking or writing. However, we may also need to understand and encourage their unobservable engagement (e.g. thinking, listening) which results from unavailable chances to voice

their opinions or their lack of confidence in their performance. From my participants' feedback in the present research, it could be inferred that they found some tasks motivating mainly because these tasks promoted their *thinking* and gave them chances to *listen* to others' opinions. This was particularly the case when they felt their non-English-related needs for personal development were satisfied.

### 6.2.1.3 Affective motivation

Affective variables such as stress, anxiety, boredom, satisfaction, self-worth concern have been considered as important factors influencing language acquisition in general and task performance in particular. For example, one of Dörnyei's research studies focused on 'the psychological dimension of cooperative language learning', and found that 'the key to its effectiveness (is) in the affective domain' (Dörnyei, 1997: 483). In another task-related study, Dörnyei and Kormos (2000) also suggested that 'students' verbal behaviour in oral task situations is partly determined by a number of non-linguistic and non-cognitive factors whose examination may constitute a potentially fruitful extension of existing task-based research paradigms' (2000: 275). Bearing the antecedents' contribution in mind, I also paid attention to the affective aspect of task motivation when analysing my data. Though I did not design particular questions to elicit participants' comments in this regard, this theme still emerged from the data, primarily in the shape of 'learner satisfaction' discussed in 6.1.3.3.



I have emphasised that learners' general satisfaction with certain tasks comes from the linguistic and cognitive effectiveness that they could experience in the tasks; and such satisfaction can be strengthened by physical and psychological comfort provided by a favourable task situation. To further understand learner satisfaction from an affective perspective, it might be necessary to look into it in a situated manner.

In the most immediate learning environment—classroom, the teacher has a key role to play in affecting student motivation. When a teacher implements a task, whether she can create a comfortable and lively atmosphere, whether she can help reduce learners' anxiety and stress, whether she can protect learners' self-esteem, whether she can provide learners with timely help, sensitive care and encouraging feedback, may all influence learners' affective motivation to engage in the task. In the present research, my participants did voice their affective experiences in this regard, either explicitly or implicitly, which enriched their evaluative comments on tasks.

From my own perspective, I also observed my students' affective responses to certain tasks in my class. Once there was such a text--*Living In Two Worlds* (Unit 3—Text II), in which the author tells of his feelings when living in two totally different worlds—one is his poor family in New Jersey, and the other is in an affluent university—Stanford. Inspired by this topic and by Willis' (1996: 26-27) pedagogical

classification of tasks, I organised a pre-reading discussion (Task 10—sharing personal experience, see Appendix 1) in which students were invited to talk about their own feelings of being at home and at the university, in groups and then to the whole class voluntarily. The task went all right at first, but ended up causing a girl to cry. During the final-stage discussion, I also saw serious looks on a number of students' faces when they were showing their awareness that they were actually stepping further and further away from their families as they grew up. I really had not expected that some students would get so 'involved' in this personalisation task. Regarding that girl, she finally told me after class that the task reminded her of some unhappiness recently going on in her family. This impressive story reminded me of how sensitive a teacher should be when she carries out learning activities in class. Teachers' responsibilities are not only to transfer knowledge, but also to give care, understanding, and support to their students and help them 'grow up' happily and healthily.

Being aware of the importance of caring about students' affective motivation, I also felt that this requirement of teachers would have to depend on some necessary conditions. It would not be easy if the class was too big for a teacher to manage. For this reason, I had certain reservations about my students' comments on their favourite participatory structure (i.e. teacher-fronted work), as this preference seemed to have much to do with the reduced class size. Thanks to the low attendance rate, the size of class in which most tasks were conducted was much smaller than it was supposed to

be (i.e. about 60 students in every class in my research context). When discussing this issue, my interviewees and I all agreed that the smaller class size encouraged better learning and teaching effects and made them and me feel more comfortable in class. Therefore, it might be reasonable to suspect that my students would not feel as much motivated as they did if the tasks were conducted in the original sized class, whatever participatory structure was employed.

The issue of class size links again to human's need for *relatedness* (Ryan and Deci, 2000; reviewed in 3.2.2.1). As Ryan and Deci (2000) state, 'in classrooms this means that students' feeling respected and cared for by teachers is essential for their willingness to accept the proffered classroom values' (2000: 64). My participants' comments at interviews coincided with this statement to a great extent. Generally speaking, most of those who regularly attended class felt that the low attendance rate benefited them a lot and even turned out to be a motivating factor for them to learn English. Here are some examples of students' comments:

'Having fewer people in class is not bad because all those attendees come to class for the purpose of learning. We have a lot in common and therefore could understand each other. This helps create a pleasant atmosphere.' (Interviewee 2, S2, Group 1, translation)

'If there were only a small number of students, the teacher knew you were there and you were unlikely to be ignored. You would be easily pushed to engage yourself in the class and follow through, which might be a way of getting motivated.' (Interviewee 1, S5, Group 2, translation)

'Although we haven't had lots of students in class this term, I feel that those who do come are getting more and more active in terms of their class participation. And we are showing more and more understanding to each other, which is good, because we may get less scared



of class.’ (Interviewee 2, S3, Group 3, translation)

‘I feel this kind of atmosphere is like in a family, every student would be able to get the teacher’s attention.... On the contrary, in a big and loose class, it’s not likely that the teacher could care you or notice you.’ (Interviewee 2, S7, Group 4, translation)

All in all, the affective dimension should be given great importance in the classroom, as it is a necessary condition for promoting effective learning. As a return, effective learning will contribute to learner satisfaction by bringing students increased confidence, enhanced self-esteem, and accumulated sense of achievement. As found in the present research, ‘affective motivation’ complemented my students’ ‘academic motivation’ and ‘personal development motivation’ in composing their motivations for tasks in particular and for language learning in general.

### **6.2.2 Reflections on generalised and situational motivation**

So far I have analysed and discussed all the task-related data collected in this research, with a predetermined aim to find out motivating task features and the reasons behind them. From students’ voices, I further explored the underlying motivational dimensions of their perceptions about motivating tasks. As it was hoped, these dimensions helped explain what motivational perspectives shaped my students’ task motivation in this specific context.

In view of the qualitative nature of this research and the descriptive approach that I employed in analysing data, I allowed the themes to emerge and let the data speak for

itself. As a result, three dimensions were identified (details have been discussed above) which seemed to me the most appropriate way of making sense of the data. This categorisation suggested an alternative way of looking at task motivation, which was apparently different from the ‘trait/state’ approach (i.e. generalised/situational motivation) that I anticipated I would be likely to use (as reviewed in Chapter 3). However, the emergence of the three underlying dimensions (i.e. academic motivation, personal development motivation, and affective motivation) did not go against the reviewed traditional approach at all, but has made the research focus more targeted for this particular research context.

Moreover, these three dimensions all seemed to be complex combinations of learners’ generalised and situation- and task-specific motivation. For example, ‘academic motivation’ reflected both students’ general attitudes towards and goals of learning English, and their specific needs for understanding a given text under the help of a certain task. ‘Personal development motivation’ both demonstrated students’ general interest in the foreign culture or the outside world, and revealed their appreciation for having the opportunity to learn each other’s thoughts and to meet certain cognitive challenges in a particular task. Similarly, ‘affective motivation’ not only showed students’ constant psychological needs for working in a supportive environment and being cared by others, but also revealed their specific stress/pressure or enjoyment/relaxation while engaging in different tasks and relevant participatory structures.

In the previous studies of and theoretical discussions about task motivation, few researchers have made explicit statements about to what extent the generalised and situational motivational influences work respectively on learners' task motivation. Though in the present research there was no 'hard' data which could offer an exact proportion between generalised and situational motivation; nevertheless, it was felt that the latter played a relatively more important role and exerted more direct influence on learners' task motivation. As Julkunen (2001) says, 'situation specific motivation refers to the motivational state in a given situation' (2001: 30). In the case of tasks, the most immediate task situation may involve the physical setting of the classroom or the task group, the participatory structure, the participants and their physical/psychological states, the group dynamics, the task topics, the stage of implementation, etc. All these factors together may immediately decide the way learners approach the task and the motivation they demonstrate in doing the task. At the moment, their situation specific motivation may reinforce or undermine their generalised motivation which is just 'standing by'. Perhaps some time later when they reflect on their earlier experience with tasks, they may have different perceptions of the task after they have time to draw on their deeply rooted generalised motivation to make more sensible evaluation. In sum, it is important for teachers to be aware of the interdependence of their learners' motivation at various levels, and accordingly create a favourable task situation which may to the greatest extent make their situational motivation complement their general motivation.



### 6.2.3 Reflections on the '3E framework'

In the closing section before concluding this chapter, I would like to add a few words about my proposed 3E framework (Expectation-Experience-Evaluation) in this research. Primarily I regarded it as a methodological framework guiding my data collection. Secondly I saw it as a pedagogical framework as well, because my data-gathering process was also a teaching process within authentic classrooms. From a researcher's perspective, my personal involvement in the authentic teaching/learning situation has proved to be worthwhile for motivation research; and the qualitative approach has helped me gain a further understanding of the complex construct of motivation. From a teacher's perspective, I felt it was absolutely essential to invite and encourage students to take an active part in and be more aware of the two-way teaching/learning cooperation, which was the purpose of introducing the 3E framework. However, the limitations and constraints within the actual context somehow inhibited this framework from working in an expected way, hence the need for further improvement and proper adaptation if it is to be applied elsewhere in the future.

My research participants also voiced their opinions on the framework in the interviews. They paid it certain compliment, but also showed more concerns about it.

Here are some comments from interviewees:

'I like it because I get myself involved in the whole process really. Once you engaged yourself in it, you would feel it interesting and worthwhile' (Interviewee 1, S5, Group 2, translation).

‘I also think this is a good teaching method which is new to us as well. We’ve been at schools for so many years and the case usually is that we simply sit there listening. I can’t tell why but do feel your method very impressive for me, a senior student who is graduating soon. But I somehow doubt whether I would have the same impression when studying at year two or year three, to be honest. I’m confident that this method would be welcomed by other teachers in other classes, but unfortunately having the concern that if it could go well in the Chinese educational context as it was supposed to be. I mean the method is fine, but our class is huge. If there were only 20 or 30 students in each class, that would be great. But if a class contained 60 students, there must be someone who had no chance at all, which would hardly bring good results.’ (Interviewee 2, S6, Group 2, translation)

‘The key point is the fundamental framework in a general sense. For young teachers like you, it may not be easy to create a novel framework in this less open context. If you are brave and innovative enough, that’s good, because students can obtain real abilities rather than scores. But if this broad context doesn’t allow you to do so, then the result of a half-new-half-traditional teaching method might be against everybody’s expectation.’ (Interviewee 3, S7, Group 3, translation)

From these comments, I could see a certain conflict between students’ willingness to experience something new in class and their subconscious preservation of the deep-rooted education norms. In the face of the almost unchangeable learning situation, it is hard for both teachers and students to put some ‘perfect’ theory into practice. This once again reminds us of the importance of taking social, cultural and contextual factors into consideration when conducting ELT research. As far as motivation research is concerned, it should be necessary for researchers to immerse themselves into the authentic learning situation for some time, because long-term and close contact with learners will be more likely to guarantee all-sided understanding of their learning motivation.

The present research with its 3E framework was just an attempt to explore task

motivation through classroom-based research. Putting its research function aside for the moment, I found that this pedagogical tool could not only encourage students' participation, but also promote my own self-reflection and development as a teacher. More importantly, it created many chances for teacher-student communication and made me further aware of the significance of the mutual understanding between two parties. All in all, as Allwright's (2003; reviewed in 4.3.1) EP principles suggested, in order to improve the quality of classroom life, it is very important to 'integrate the work for understanding into classroom practice' (2003: 130). Hopefully, the 3E framework could serve as an effective means towards this end.

### **6.3 Conclusion**

This chapter mainly focused on the analysis and discussion of all task-related data, including students' task-design opinions, post-task feedback, and final-stage interviews. Based on students' selections of the top five tasks, the chapter discussed the perceived motivating task features in terms of task topics, participatory structures, positioning of tasks, and task types. It also discussed three identified underlying sources of task motivation, that is, academic motivation, personal development motivation, and affective motivation. The chapter concluded with some reflections on the earlier reviewed trait/state approach to task motivation research, followed by the reflections on my proposed 3E framework.



## Chapter 7 Data Analysis and Discussion (II)

### 7.0 Introduction

After dealing with the task-related data in the previous chapter, I now go on to analyse and discuss the remaining data aiming to understand the participants' learning motivation from a broader perspective. There are two major sections in this chapter. The first one provides a detailed content analysis of over a hundred students' letters, based on which motivational and demotivational components are identified and discussed respectively. The second one is a further discussion about three noticeable themes that emerged from the data, namely, 'significance of teacher-student relationship', 'motivational conflict and prioritisation', and 'motivational development and personal development'.

### 7.1 Analysis and discussion of the remaining data

As indicated earlier, I divided all the data into two groups, with the first one focusing on students' motivation for classroom tasks in particular (see Chapter 6) and the second one looking at their learning motivation in general (the current chapter). In other words, the previous chapter investigated task motivation at a *micro* level, whereas this one tends to explore student motivation at a *macro* level. As the relationship between these two perspectives is like a small circle embedded in a big one rather than two completely exclusive areas, there may not be hard and fast distinctions between them. In chapter 6, I have already touched upon certain broader

learning issues which affected learners' perceptions of motivating tasks. In this chapter, I am going to further explore motivational influences in various aspects and am hoping to understand teaching, learning, and classroom life in more depth.

Thanks to the 'balanced' approach (see 4.3.2) that I ended up using during my teaching/data-gathering fieldwork, I managed to collect 124 letters from every individual participant, which was not planned at the very start. This idea occurred to me after having noticed the low attendance rate for some time, and was prompted by a free chat with a student a few days before the mid-term exam. She made me aware of the possible misunderstanding that existed between me and my students due to my late return and a couple of periods of leave I had to ask for afterwards. Meanwhile, I had a feeling that there must be other reasons that demotivated them to attend the class, apart from being busy with the postgraduate entrance exams which I was not surprised about. As it happened to be time for the mid-term test which was a perfect chance of getting all students involved, I decided to invite them to write personal letters to me (which formed part of the test but would not be graded) saying whatever they would like to say surrounding a given topic—'why do/don't you come to class'. Apart from seeking understandings of the cause of low attendance rate, I was also hoping to remove all unnecessary misunderstandings through sincere communication with them, which I believed would help make my remaining work with them a little bit easier. As a result, what students wrote in these letters covered almost all learning issues that they confronted, and therefore turned out to be very valuable data for this

research.

When dealing with these letters that were written in either English or Chinese as my students liked, my first step was to re-arrange the raw data in a more organised way and tease out all possible themes that naturally emerged as well as the times they were mentioned. Some sample data was also coded by my supervisor in order to achieve ‘objectivity’ as much as possible. The second step was to categorise these themes according to their similarities and relatedness for later description and discussion purposes. After reading through the letters a few times, I sorted out the useful information and inputted them into an organised file. The basic criterion was to differentiate reasons for *attending class* from those for *skipping class*. In general, the former group of reasons included students’ positive comments on me and my teaching, their awareness of the importance of learning English, the relatedness of this course with their personal goals, and some other minor aspects. The latter group of reasons covered the same areas as well, but in an opposite way, for example, unsatisfactory aspects of my teaching, useless and irrelevant contents of the course, negative influence of previous learning experience on their later motivation, and conflicts between attending class and pursuing other personal goals.

It should be made clear that the above criteria only functioned to classify the comments rather than students, because most students listed a complex set of reasons



including both positive and negative ones. For example, those who regularly attended class might point out something that they were not satisfied with; whereas those who seldom went to class also spelt out a lot of positive things that they appreciated. Moreover, it was interesting to notice that a number of students tended to speak for the whole class rather than for themselves, as they often used the personal pronoun ‘we’ instead of ‘I’. Perhaps this is a way of showing solidarity with peers, distancing themselves from the content of their comments, or reducing a sense of personal responsibility or guilt. Whether or no, I just collected all similar viewpoints together, no matter if they were made by regular attendees or absentees, on behalf of themselves or others as well. It was hoped that this way of categorisation would allow me to see what factors *could* potentially motivate or demotivate learners within this particular research context.

### **7.1.1 Reasons for attending class**

There were altogether 124 students in the two classes, but in the end 117 letters (61 out of 64 in Class One, and 56 out of 60 in Class Two) were used for this research, because the rest only wrote some personal things which had little to do with the research questions. For the sake of confidentiality, I will only use numbers instead of students’ real names when quoting their words. These numbers were not their authentic student ID at university, but given randomly according to the order in which I read through the letters. The numbers I used when quoting students’ comments in the previous chapter (such as S1, S2) were based on this order as well.

Basically, I put the ‘interviewees’ first, ‘regular attendees’ in the middle, and ‘others’ in the later part of the list.

A few themes emerged from the letters after the first couple of times’ reading. According to the number of times that they were mentioned, I made the following table. The left column lists students’ reasons (in key words only) for attending class, and the right one indicates how many students mentioned these reasons. As it was often the case that students listed more than one reason each, the totals in the right column exceed the actual number of letters written.

Reasons	Frequency
My teaching methods/quality/style	39
About me (my personal quality, style, personality, etc.)	27
For the purpose of taking TEM-8/pg exams	14
Perceived importance/benefits of attending class (in general)	11
Perceived importance of this course (in particular)	11
My background of living/studying in the UK	9
To cherish the limited time left at university	8
Being good student and responsible for oneself	7
To release pressure	4
For future teaching career or jobs in general	5
Interest in English or this course	3
Not to waste money (tuition fees)	2
For attendance record	1

Table 7-1: Reasons for attending class.

Partly intrigued by Dörnyei’s (1994; reviewed in 3.3.2) motivational framework, and partly based on my further content analysis of the connections among these themes, I classified them into three groups of motivational components which were

respectively teacher-specific, learner-specific, and course-specific. This looks similar to the three sets of motivational components identified at the 'learning situation level' by Dörnyei (1994), with the primary difference being that I substituted learner-specific components for group-specific ones. The new label seemed more appropriate to cover the variety of my students' reasons for attending class which were more related to their individual goals and needs, but less related to group dynamics. Moreover, it combined certain motivational aspects at 'language level' and 'learner level' within Dörnyei's (1994) motivational framework. For example, most of the learner goals were determined by their instrumental motives (at the language level), and meanwhile demonstrated their needs for achievement (at the learner level).

Regarding the other two sets of motivational components (i.e. teacher-specific and course-specific), there were certain overlaps as well owing to the inseparability between a teacher and the course she teaches. Despite the connection, I still divided them into two groups, with the former one gathering students' comments on me and what I brought into the class, and the latter one collecting their thoughts about attending class in general and about studying this particular module. Table 7-2 (see next page) is the classification of the above identified themes which might explain why the research participants were motivated to attend my class.



<b>Teacher-specific motivational components</b>	♦ Satisfying aspects of my teaching methods/ quality/ style	39
	♦ My personal quality/ style/ personality	28
	♦ My background of living/studying in the UK	9
		(76)
<b>Learner-specific motivational components</b>	<b>Academic/career goals</b>	
	♦ For the purpose of taking TEM-8/pg exams	14
	♦ For future teaching career or jobs in general	5
	<b>Human/psychological needs</b>	
	♦ To cherish the limited time left at university	8
	♦ Being good student	7
	♦ To release pressure	4
	♦ Not to waste money (tuition fees)	2
	<b>Intrinsic regulation</b>	
	♦ Interest in English or this course	3
	<b>External regulation</b>	
	♦ For attendance record	1
		(44)
<b>Course-specific motivational components</b>	♦ Perceived importance/benefits of attending class (in general)	11
	♦ Perceived importance/benefits of this course (in particular)	11
		(22)

Table 7-2: Classification of students' reasons for attending class

### 7.1.1.1 Teacher-specific motivational components

It was clear to see that most students (76 out of 117) gave reasons which were directly related to me. Students seemed to look at me either as a teacher or just as a special person whom they knew about, hence the various comments on both my teaching and my personal qualities. My multi-identity in their eyes could be seen from the ways they addressed me, including 'Dear Miss Li' (i.e. my surname), 'Dear Anna' (i.e. my English name), 'Dear Li Na (my full name put in Chinese way), 'Dear

Nana' (my nickname), 'Dear sister', 'Dear friend', 'Dear teacher'. etc. It was interesting to note this point at the beginning of this section because it revealed a kind of 'intimacy' between the teacher and students which might be unusual in many other educational contexts. In most Western cultures, the relationship between both sides tends to be equal but not that close. Even in Asian culture, this 'intimacy' seems somewhat incompatible with the generally believed hierarchical relations between the teacher and students where the former is seen as the authority in a much senior place. Although in the Chinese context the teacher is also seen by some students as a 'parent' or 'friend' (Cortazzi and Jin, 1996: 74), hardly any research has revealed the fairly 'intimate' relationship that the teacher and students can possibly have, and how it can influence both parties in their work and study.

As regards my special relationship with my research participants, one possible reason is that we had shared history two years before, i.e., I had taught them for one year before conducting this research and already developed a good rapport with them. In addition, the small age difference between us might be another favourable condition for me to get along with them easily. It was totally a coincidence to work with them for the present research, which in a sense forecasted the complexity that our unusual intimacy would bring to the research findings. In the following, I am going to explore the perceived positive influences I seemed to have on their motivations to attend my class, including how they thought of me and my teaching.

#### 7.1.1.1.1 My teaching quality

As my primary role was certainly a teacher, students made a lot of comments on the quality of my teaching, including my *teaching style/approach/methods*, the *class atmosphere*, my *attitudes towards teaching*, and some other minor aspects. Naturally, different students had different opinions, though I was the same and only teacher whom they were talking about. I am going to focus on the positive comments in this part and leave the negative ones for later.

**Firstly**, the majority of the 39 students who commented on my teaching quality referred to some general *teaching approach/methods* that I adopted. Eight students touched upon certain ‘*tasks*’ that I implemented in class; while most others appreciated my way of teaching ‘*texts*’ in general. In terms of tasks, the positive comments included the clear task instruction, the innovative and interesting ideas, as well as the participating opportunities created by tasks. For example, a student wrote the following words:

‘In class, I found your style different from other teachers. For example, you always gave us clear and detailed instruction when assigning tasks to us, so that we could know what we should do and how to do it, with a willingness to follow you; whereas some other teachers just gave us a topic without clarifying any task objectives, which left us very confused.’  
(S1, Class 1, translation)

Apart from the general comments on ‘tasks’ as a whole, (or in some students’ words ‘discussion’, ‘team work’), a couple of students mentioned a particular task (i.e. Task 3—peer-teaching, see Appendix 1). Probably because they invested much time and



effort in this task, it seemed to have made a deeper impression on them and was felt to be more beneficial. As a student wrote:

‘I did learn something from that peer-teaching experience. After having prepared the lesson for at least 3 hours, I still felt it was so hard to teach. This experience made me deeply understand that it would cost so much time and energy for a responsible teacher to teach well, even just for one lesson.’ (S26, Class 1, translation)

Despite the limited task-related comments, it is still reasonable to advocate the idea of integrating tasks into all possible classroom contexts, although we would need to bear in mind that effective tasks need to be carefully designed and implemented, and that students’ potential willingness to participate would need to be greatly encouraged.

By comparison, students tended to be more concerned with the effects of my teaching *texts*, which coincided with the underlying ‘text-centred and teacher-centred cultures of learning’ in China (Jin and Cortazzi, 2006: 16). In a sense, ‘textbooks’ are regarded as the ‘bible’ for both teachers and students. Although most of my research participants disliked the prescribed textbooks (evidence will be provided later when I present their reasons for skipping class), they could not deny the fact that textbooks were being used throughout their learning process and would form parts of all relevant exams. Therefore, it was no surprise to find that a large amount of positive comments on my class were regarding the way I dealt with the textbook and drove home the meaning of texts. One of the commonly mentioned good points was my clear and logical explanation/analysis of the language and contents, especially my

emphasis on the macro structure/organisation of each individual text rather than on the isolated words and sentences. Here are a few of students' comments in this regard:

'When I read our textbook by myself, I had no idea how to start it at all. Sometimes I even couldn't make sense of a text after reading it for several times. But in your class, your explanation and analysis of the key words/sentences and especially of the macro structure made everything clear to me. I guess this is the most important reason for me to come to your class.' (S11, Class 2, translation)

'I didn't attend many of your class this term. But among those I attended, I liked the way you taught. Your analysis was very clear, which helped us understand the development and organisation of a text fairly easily.' (S35, Class 1, translation)

'When I learn the text by myself, I can't make clear the whole structure of the text, but after your explanation, a clear picture will come to my mind. Before, none of our intensive teachers had ever analysed the whole structure for us. After learning the text in their classes, we just knew some new words, and the information is still in fraction.' (S27, Class 1, original)

Comments like the above implied that a teacher's way of teaching, especially the effectiveness of teacher presentation, could be an important motivating factor. The significance of teacher effectiveness has been testified in a great deal of academic research. As Anderson (2004) summarises, 'differential teacher effectiveness is a strong determinant of differences in student learning' (2004: 20). Meanwhile, it was found that students' judgement on the effectiveness depends to a certain extent on their learning aims and expectations. In this research, some students were hoping to understand the given texts better and to improve their reading skills, and therefore could appreciate my help in this aspect. Moreover, they were aware of the nature of this course which is 'advanced English reading' as its name denotes. Hence, they

would not be satisfied with learning grammar in isolation or new words only: but expected to understand the essence of complicated articles and at the same time to develop some strategies which would be useful for their own reading. In general, understanding learners' needs and expectations at different levels is important for a teacher to plan her lesson and to select a proper focus.

Apart from the specific teaching methods, the **second** possible reason which motivated students to learn English with me was the *class atmosphere*. Among the 39 students who commented positively on my teaching, 10 of them mentioned this aspect. In general, they used a few words such as 'interesting', 'interactive', 'lively', 'no pressure', 'comfortable', 'relaxing', 'feel at ease' to describe how they felt about the atmosphere. I included this aspect into 'teacher-specific motivational components' because most of these participants tended to attribute the good class atmosphere to my style and approach. As a couple of students wrote:

'I like the way you teach, your class is light and has an atmosphere of freedom. Probably this is because we're friends, at least in my eyes.' (S29, Class1, original)

'In your class, there is no gap between us. I feel at ease as if I were listening to stories told by a gentle and kind elder sister.' (S39, Class 2, original)

In addition, several other participants thought the good atmosphere was related to the small-size class. However, it seemed that few students mentioned the roles that they themselves could have played in creating a lively classroom atmosphere. In other words, they were either inclined to think that it was the teacher's responsibility for this, or that it was somewhat dependent on the external conditions such as a 'small



class' which was just a contingency in this research. In view that a good class atmosphere could certainly be a motivating factor, it is important to increase students' awareness that both teachers and they themselves have active parts to play in the classroom, and neither party is able to take all responsibilities by itself. This awareness might be crucial for Chinese students (and for those in other similar contexts) because most of them have been used to the teacher-led (or 'teacher-centred') classroom culture (Jin and Cortazzi, 2006; Cortazzi and Jin, 1996).

**Thirdly**, when students commented on the overall teaching quality, some of them connected it with my *teaching attitude*. At least six students pointed out this aspect explicitly, by using the words like 'responsible', 'conscientious' and 'efforts'. They tended to believe that the quality of one's teaching is a clear reflection of one's attitude towards teaching, regardless of actual competence. In their eyes, important evidence of teaching attitudes was how well the teacher prepares her lesson. Though no students can actually 'see' their teachers' preparation outside class, they may clearly 'feel' it when the teachers teach in the classroom. As a student wrote in her letter to me:

'Your explanation is interesting and detailed. We can feel your efforts before class. You are not like some other teachers who always laze away the class. That's like cheating us of our money.' (S35, Class1, translation)

Interestingly, this topic was brought up by students in the interviews as well. They expressed similar opinions in terms of the importance of teaching attitudes. As some

interviewees said:

‘I feel nowadays some teachers make us students very disappointed, as they lack correct attitudes.’ (Interviewee 3, S7, Group 3, translation)

‘Just like our previous teacher last term, I clearly knew that he was dealing with us unconcernedly. Actually we could tell clearly whether a teacher prepared his lesson or not, though we wouldn’t let him know.’ (Interviewee 1, S5, Group 3, translation)

‘For a teacher, sense of responsibility is everything; whereas his own competence is not of prime importance. I hate those teachers who never prepare lessons and just laze away the class, no matter how competent they are.’ (Interviewee 2, S2, Group 1, translation)

In a sense, my participants’ opinions as such seemed to coincide with Dörnyei’s (1994) viewpoint of one motivational aspect of the teacher in terms of ‘his or her role in direct and systematic socialisation of student motivation, that is, whether he or she actively develops and stimulates learners’ motivation’ (1994: 278). No matter whether the teacher is aware or not, her attitude will influence her students’ motivations for class. This might be particularly true for those students who tend to attribute the quality of class to their teacher’s attitudes toward teaching.

**Finally**, I am going to close this subsection by mentioning an unusual but interesting statement made by only one student who summarised my good points as a good teacher, that is, ‘responsible’ and ‘don’t postpone class’ (original words, meaning I always dismiss class on time). This seemingly minor point corroborated the key role that the teacher plays in the classroom. It is interesting to find that everything about a teacher could be attended to by her students, including the way she teaches textbooks,

manages classes, even the way she generally behaves and dresses. Small wonder, things like ‘not postponing class’ could also make a student regard her teacher as a caring and punctual person.

#### **7.1.1.1.2 My personal qualities**

There were 28 students’ comments included in this subgroup focusing on me as a person from a holistic perspective. Although some of the comments were still closely related to my quality demonstrated in class as a teacher, it was felt that they revealed my students’ impression of me as a whole rather than just how I taught in class as discussed above. Besides my teaching methods and attitudes toward teaching, students also seemed very concerned with my personality, character, temperament, and general life style or attitudes towards life.

My research participants’ impressions of my personal qualities were based not only on the four-month fieldwork for this research, but also on the former days when I taught them two years before. Though not planned, this shared history executed great influence on how they approached me and what they expected of my class. There were even a few students who commented on me with an overtone of appreciation barely masked. For example:

‘It’s not easy to meet a few good teachers in one’s life. For me, you are one of them, gentle and mild, conscientious and decent. Our first year’s class with you is still very impressive. We often talked about you and imagined your life abroad. You really left me with an impression of beauty, from inside to outside, from language to behaviour. I like you indeed. (S3, Class 1, translation)



‘What impressed me most was not any of your classes, but your beautiful smile. I even wrote an article about you titled ‘Smiles’ and got published in our university newspaper.’ (S12, Class 1, translation)

‘Perhaps because your intonation, appearance, temperament and such kind of things attract me, I approach you bring the heart of learning from you.’ (S17, Class 2, original)

‘I only had three or four times of your classes this term, but was impressed differently every time by your perception of life and study, by the way you love and teach us, and by your pursuit of the form and connotation of beauty.’ (S18, Class 2, translation)

It would be understandable if someone argued that my students wrote this for the purpose of pleasing me or getting a good mark. However, from my personal perspective, I would trust them not only because I had stressed the zero connection between their letters and mid-term exam results (as I clarified to students that the exam results would depend only on the other parts of the test), but also because I had the same feelings for my students as how they felt about me. To a large extent, this level of intimacy and way of expressing one’s feelings might have something to do with the Chinese culture. Moreover, taking the nature of ‘personal letters’ into account, it was no surprise to see these words though they were unlikely to appear in any other writings like essays or assignments. The opportunity of obtaining these valuable letters and experiencing this unusual ‘emotionality’ expressed in these letters should also be attributed to my personal involvement in this research as a teacher researcher. This aspect seems to be a rarely touched area in the literature due to most researchers’ single identity and the invisible distance between them and their subjects/participants. In the authentic classrooms, however, especially in the Chinese context which I am most familiar with, this close relationship might be common to many teachers and students at various levels, but perhaps less apparent to

non-participant observers or to those unfamiliar with Chinese classroom culture.

When my research participants recalled the happy time of the past with me, they naturally established their new expectations of me two years later when I was there to teach them again. Though I did not collect any data in this regard at the beginning of my fieldwork, it could be seen from some of students' mid-term letters that their early expectations did shape their initial intention to come to my class. As a few students wrote:

‘We were very excited and surprised to know that Miss Li, a doctoral student, would be teaching us this term. This was not only because you left a perfect impression to us two years ago, but also because we wanted to know more about the current you.’ (S1, Class 1, translation)

‘I liked you very much when I was in my first year, and this feeling has lasted till now. When I heard at the beginning of this term that you were coming back to teach us again, I was so glad and excited, and couldn't wait to see you.’ (S2, Class 1, translation)

‘Before you came back this term, I had already had a high expectation of you, thinking that a doctor's class must be different. I had made up my mind to attend your class every time so as to learn as much as possible from you during the remaining time.’ (S7, Class 2, translation)

In sum, how students think of their teacher could affect the extent to which they are devoted to the relevant course (Dörnyei, 1994). Although my shared history with the participants was something special in this research and therefore might not be widely applicable, it could remind all teachers that what their students care about is not only how they teach, but also how they generally behave as a person. Dörnyei (1994) has pointed out that ‘modelling’ is one of the main channels for teachers’ ‘socialisation of student motivation’ (1994: 278). That is to say, students tend to model themselves

after their teachers' attitudes and orientations toward learning. In the present research, the findings seem to extend the scale of modelling from learning a subject to learning to be a person. This seems particularly true in the Chinese educational context in which teachers are often seen by their students, and are also expected by the society to behave, as 'models' in various aspects (Cortazzi and Jin, 1996).

#### 7.1.1.1.3 My overseas background

By the time I went back to China to conduct my research in 2004, I had already lived and studied in the UK for a couple of years. Clearly, this background was one of the motivating factors for some students to come to my class. Nine students were included into this subgroup as they pointed out this factor explicitly, whereas most others just mentioned it implicitly when commenting on other aspects of me or my teaching.

Among the nine students, two of them showed particular interest in 'western pedagogy' and 'British educational concept'; while the rest covered various aspects such as custom, culture, and my general life and study experience abroad. It was interesting to note that most students were not only curious about what I had *seen* while abroad, but more interested to know how I *thought* about it as well as how/whether it had *changed* me. For example:

'I'm not interested in our textbook at all and never expect to learn much from it. But what really attracted me in your class were your new thoughts, your experience abroad, and your viewpoints about the cultural difference between East and West.' (S22, Class 1, translation)



‘We want very much to know your life and study experience at abroad, and particularly want to see what you’ve changed during the past couple of years.’ (S26, Class 1, translation)

‘I like listening to you talk about your overseas experiences, which may increase my understanding of life and the world.’ (S12, Class1, translation)

In a sense, no matter what I brought to my class, the fact that I had overseas background seemed able to motivate some students. Meanwhile, all these comments demonstrated students’ willingness to develop their cultural knowledge and insights, possibly through the teacher’s personal experience and insights. In other words, they tended to see the teacher as a window to the western or outside world. This point also related to my students’ task-specific attitudes discussed in the previous chapter from both a language-learning perspective and a personal development perspective (see 6.1.3.1 and 6.1.3.2). In addition, referring back to the ‘integrative/instrumental’ dichotomy (Gardner and Lambert, 1972; Gardner, 1985) reviewed in 3.2.1, the above quotations and other similar comments showed some students’ general interest in foreignness. However, this does not necessarily mean they were hoping to identify themselves with the foreign community. Rather, it was felt that the students’ ultimate aims were to broaden their knowledge and to develop profound insights, which would help them become more competent and competitive in their own society. This finding seems applicable to many other EFL countries as well. As Chen, Warden and Chang (2005) state, ‘...the vast majority of English teachers across the globe are teaching students with no intention of leaving home to enter an English-speaking environment’ (2005: 610).

To summarise thus far, the above three subdivisions (i.e. my teaching quality, my personal qualities, and my overseas background) formed the most important group of motivational components which were teacher-specific. The overwhelming majority (i.e. 76 out of 117) of students commented in this regard. It proved the key role that the teacher could play as one of the ‘significant others’ (Williams and Burden, 1997), which is also an important part of Dörnyei’s (1994) 3-level motivational framework. In other words, the teacher’s influence on students can be demonstrated in various aspects, including her teaching methods, style, approach, her personal style, characters, as well as her attitudes toward teaching, learning and life in general.

To further understand the importance of the teacher in the Chinese context, it might be necessary to consider social and cultural factors as well. In Confucian heritages of learning, there is an ancient Chinese saying which defines ‘teacher’ as someone who is responsible for delivering values/truth/meaning of life, transferring knowledge, and clearing up questions. Jin and Cortazzi (2006) also introduce a more recent Chinese expression for ‘teach’ which means to ‘teach the book’ and ‘cultivate people’ (2006: 11). In whichever expression, the underlying meaning of the characterisation of good teachers indicates that the teacher is expected to have both ‘expertise’ and ‘social morality of being a good and caring person’ (ibid). With reference to this aspect of Chinese culture, it is easier to understand why my students care that much about how I teach (i.e. my teaching quality) as well as what kind of person I am (i.e. my personal qualities).

### **7.1.1.2 Learner-specific motivational components**

According to the classification (see Table 7-2), the second biggest group of motivational components are learner-specific. 44 out of 117 students attributed their motivations for class to a number of personal reasons rather than teacher-related ones. These reasons were divided into four subgroups. The first two subgroups focused on my participants' academic/career goals (i.e. needs for achievement) and other social goals (i.e. human/psychological needs). The last two subgroups were concerned with the intrinsic and external regulations from learners' perspective (Deci and Ryan, 2002). Compared with Dörnyei's (1994) 3-level motivational framework, the overall learner-specific motivational components identified in this research referred not only to the motivations at 'learner level', but also involved certain aspects at 'language level' and 'learning situation level'. In a sense, it was a combination of the three with the primary focus on learners.

#### **7.1.1.2.1 Academic/career goals**

There were 19 students who clearly stated that they came to class for the purpose of achieving their self-determined goals. 14 of them emphasised English-related academic goals, including taking TEM-8 (Test for English majors—Band 8) and postgraduate entrance exams; while the other five mentioned their career goals, including teaching profession and other types of graduate jobs.



In terms of the former goal, some students realised the connection between the class and their forthcoming exams. As a couple of students wrote:

‘Another important reason is that the knowledge in the textbook maybe have some close relationship with my postgraduate exams. And the new words in this textbook are also very important.’(S10, Class 2, original)

‘The intensive reading course is of prime importance. A lot of students failed their postgraduate exams last year just because they didn’t pass this subject. A successful student from last year told me that it would be better not to skip this course. Learning English takes time. Perhaps you won’t feel this course useful after attending a couple of classes, but it will make great difference after a long time. I have the same feeling.’ (S18, Class 1, translation)

As regards the latter goal, there were four students who showed their own interests in becoming teachers, and therefore hoped to learn something from my class. A typical example is as follows:

‘I seldom absent at your class that is because I want to be a teacher after my graduation, and I want to learn how to be a teacher from your teaching.’ (S12, Class 2, original)

No matter whether exam-oriented or job-oriented, these goals all indicated the ‘instrumental’ nature of learning motivation, which has been believed to play a dominant role in the acquisition of a language in many EFL contexts. In the Chinese context, for example, exam-oriented motivation is likely to be an enduring feature of a learner’s entire educational experience, from elementary school to university level. Speaking of ‘developmental stage’ (Williams and Burden, 1997), it seems that this factor has a more direct relationship with learners’ job-oriented motivations. In this connection, Dörnyei (1996) points out that younger foreign language learners such as elementary school pupils are less likely to have clear job-related motives. However, it is found that job preparation is a practical and relevant concern among most

university-level students. It seems that the more mature the learners are, the clearer career goals they are likely to have, although as Ushioda (2001) states, ‘...career perspectives may take considerable time to crystallise and provide a definitive goal structure to their motivation’ (2001: 118-119).

Another interesting point found in this research was the relationship between exam-oriented and job-oriented goals. It seemed that these two orientations interacted in either a mutually reinforcing or more complex way to direct my students’ learning choices and efforts. Some students chose to take certain optional exams (e.g. postgraduate exams, TEM-8) in the hope of obtaining better jobs in certain areas in the future. In this case, their relatively clear career perspectives boosted their motivation to work hard on those exams. For other students, however, the roots of their exam-oriented motivation were rather different. They might have less clear career plans or even feared entering the job market too soon, and opted for further postgraduate studies, even if they had little real academic interest in them. In short, their exam-oriented motivation might result from a kind of avoidance strategy in relation to career plans, but it was still important for them to do well in examinations. Thus whatever reasons lay behind the desire to learn English, whether for genuine career reasons or not, the students clearly directed their efforts towards the exam-oriented goals and this exam-oriented motivation was equally effective for both groups.

#### 7.1.1.2.2 Psychological needs

Following the previous discussion, the influences of situational factors on my participants' learning motivation were demonstrated in other aspects as well. Apart from academic and career goals, some students also had special 'social relationship goals' (Wentzel, 2000: 106) to achieve in class before graduation. I grouped these reasons separately because they were not for instrumental or utilitarian purposes like jobs or exams, and had little to do with learning English either. Rather, they reflected my students' psychological needs. For example, eight students mentioned that they came to class with the purpose to cherish the limited time left at university and to be with me and their classmates. This is truly understandable because some of the participants might not have further chances to study in the classroom any more once they graduated from university. As a student wrote:

'I will graduate next year, every time I imagine the complex society, I will have a little fear. These days I cherish the peaceful time on campus. Once I leave the campus, maybe I will have no other chances to come back. So this is one reason why I want to come to the class. I really want to enjoy the time to be a student.' (S3, Class 2, original)

Being apart from each other soon was another reason for some students to come to class, as they would feel sad to leave their friends and classmates. This emotion may be common in many contexts across the world; and in China there might be more practical reasons to explain this. In most of the university contexts, for example, all students live on campus accommodation, with 4-8 students sharing one room. Students from the same class are normally allocated rooms very close to each other, typically on the same floor. Therefore, a class is like a family for most students, if not



all, hence the close relationship among them. Actually, this can be seen as one of the ‘basic psychological needs’ of human beings in terms of ‘relatedness’ (reviewed in 3.2.2.1), which refers to ‘feeling connected to others, to caring for and being cared for by those others, to having a sense of belongingness both with other individuals and with one’s community’ (Deci and Ryan, 2002: 7). For example, one of my participants expressed her feelings as follows:

‘In this final year, everybody seems so busy with their own business that there is hardly any time for us to get together. You know, we’ve been with each other for 3 years, with mutual care and understanding. I really want to take all possible opportunities to stay with them now.’ (S3, Class 1, translation)

Four other students indicated similar reasons, that is, to relax and release their pressure by being with their classmates in class. For instance:

‘Preparing for postgraduate exams is very boring, and everybody seems so busy on their own. But in this class, you could from time to time inspire our life. You are like our sister and friend, but not like other teachers who look so distant from us. Having your class can make me relax, just like getting together with old friends.’ (S13, Class 1, translation)

If the above reasons had much to do with the final-year situation, then the following couple of reasons (i.e. being a good student and not wasting tuition fees) mentioned by nine students were less situation-specific. They revealed some participants’ internal beliefs of being a good student which might be shaped by social pressure or other ‘introjected regulation’ (Deci and Ryan, 2002; reviewed in 3.2.2.2). In other words, they thought attending class was a student’s obligation and was the expected way to behave, no matter for the sake of their teachers, parents, or themselves. This kind of student belief was also related to the ‘Confucian heritages of learning’ discussed by Jin and Cortazzi (2006). It is widely known that in Chinese tradition

‘the teacher is often regarded as an authoritative parent to whom respect and obedience are due’ (2006: 12). As my students wrote:

‘From primary school to college, I am an obedient student, it is my strong notion that a student should attend important classes to ensure that he can learn enough knowledge, since teachers are always better than students, more or less, we do can learn something in class.’ (S5, Class 2, original)

‘As a student, it is obvious that we should attend class. On the one hand, it is our duty to attend class; on the other hand, it is a waste of our money and not showing our respect to the teachers.’ (S31, Class 1, original)

These two reasons were grouped into ‘human/psychological needs’ because they made some learners feel what they were doing was right. Along with the earlier discussed purposes of cherishing time and releasing pressure, all these motivational factors laid stress on learners’ psychological/affective reaction to attending class. This reminds us again of the complexity of student motivation within authentic classrooms. What teachers should be concerned about were not only learners’ motivations for learning, but also their motivations for many other things. As Maslow’s (1970, 1987) ‘Need Hierarchy’ suggests, apart from the basic physiological and safety needs, human beings have various other needs such as the belongingness needs, esteem needs, and self-actualisation needs (1987: 15-22).

#### **7.1.1.2.3 Intrinsic regulation**

Being intrinsically motivated is an ideal state of learning for students from most teachers’ and educators’ perspective. Unfortunately, only three students in the present research showed their intrinsic interest in English or in this course when they explained their reasons for attending class. This was not unexpected in view of my

participants' developmental stage as well as the learning context surrounding them. On the one hand, as learners grow up from early childhood to later mature stage, their intrinsic motivation 'becomes weaker with each advancing stage' (Ryan and Deci, 2000: 60). On the other hand, being in the final year and facing graduation, my participants must have a great deal of pressure both from outside (e.g. the social expectation) and from within (e.g. their self-determined goals), which might be competing with their intrinsic motivation in regulating their learning behaviours.

#### **7.1.1.2.4 External regulation**

'External regulation' seems least important in this research as there was only one student who considered 'attendance record' as a reason for him to attend class. Here it may be necessary to clarify that I did not classify examination pressure into this group because the exams my students referred to (mainly postgraduate exams) were not compulsory ones such as mid-term test or final exams within the university. They chose to take those optional exams as a means to achieve their future academic or career goals; and to a great extent, they have internalised these goals as well as the significance of the relevant exams.

In general, it seems that mature students are less likely to do something simply out of 'mere compliance with external control' (Ryan and Deci, 2000: 60). In most cases, they have other better reasons to decide whether and how to do things. These reasons may not necessarily be connected with one's intrinsic interest. Rather, they often



relate to various types of regulations that a person internalises. As reviewed in 3.2.2, Deci and Ryan's (2000; 2002) self-determination continuum (see Table 3-1) represents a process of 'internalisation' which describes 'how one's motivation for behaviour can range from amotivation or unwillingness, to passive compliance, to active personal commitment' (Ryan and Deci, 2000: 60). In terms of attending class in the present research, it was noted that the majority of the regular attendees seemed to have either identified with the personal importance of attending class (known as 'identification'), or fully transformed the value of the course into their own (known as 'integration'). Certainly, there were also a small number of students who may have attended class only because it was required or expected of them (known as 'introjected regulation'). In sum, within an educational context, it is not realistic to expect every student to have intrinsic motivation for learning. Rather, it is more important to help and encourage students to set appropriate goals for themselves or to consciously internalise the initially external goals and values. Striving for identified or integrated goals is also believed to be able to result in satisfactory learning outcomes.

So far I have analysed and discussed learner-specific motivational components which consisted of four groups of reasons that might explain why my research participants were motivated to attend class. The first group of reasons indicated that some students came to learn English in my class with the purpose of pursuing their English-related academic or career goals, which could be seen as their needs for

achievement. The second group revealed some participants' other social or individual goals beyond learning English, which could be seen as basic human/psychological needs. The last two minor groups of reasons related to 'intrinsic regulation' and 'external regulation' were less common and very rarely mentioned by my students.

### **7.1.1.3 Course-specific motivational components**

The last group of motivational components to be discussed is specific to the course in question. Though in a separate group, course-specific components are still related to the previous two (i.e. teacher-specific and learner-specific). This relation is evident, because it is the teacher who teaches the course and the students who study it. In a sense, the course is like a 'channel' connecting both parties in the classroom. In this research, there are 22 participants who explicitly explained course-related reasons for attending my class. Basically, they talked about how they perceived the importance of attending class in general or of studying this module in particular, in connection with their various personal development goals. That is to say, the former perception indicated that students thought they could or had already personally tasted the usefulness of studying with teachers in class. The latter perception showed how students understood the nature and importance of this particular module.

#### **7.1.1.3.1 Perceived importance/benefits of attending class**

Most of the included comments in this part were about the participants' perceived benefits from attending my class, including improving English, getting to understand

the texts, broadening horizons, etc. Three of them talked about the effectiveness of studying with the teacher in class by making comparison with studying on their own. In particular, the most impressive comments were from two students who critically discussed the meaning of obtaining education in view of their short-term and long-term personal development goals. As they wrote:

‘I think going to class is a wise choice, because you can communicate with the teacher and other students. Learning to use our heads to think over some problems is a kind of ability which cannot be developed within a short period of time. We shouldn’t leave everything aside just because of the postgraduate exams. Taking this exam is a short-term goal, whereas the long-term aim is to improve ourselves in all aspects, especially to explore our potentials. The significance of such potentials may not be clearly seen at this stage, but it will finally decide our destiny. I really hope all my classmates could be far-sighted rather than just seeing things around.’ (S4, Class 1, translation)

‘The purpose of coming to class is to learn. To learn what? To learn things that we can’t learn from the textbooks. So long as you pay enough attention, you’ll be able to learn something. We don’t care how many new words are taught, we’re concerned about what the teacher can really bring to us, especially the things which would benefit us for the rest of our life, such as good attitudes, ability to think, and ways of solving problems.’ (S8, Class 1, translation)

Actually, similar voices from other participants appeared elsewhere as well. I was pleased to discover that some of my students could understand education to this extent. Connecting this desire for learning with their feedback on tasks (from a personal development perspective) discussed in the previous chapter, it once again confirmed students’ felt needs for being educated in a broader sense. Clearly, they were aware of their identities not only as learners studying various subjects, but also as human beings pursuing all-round development and fulfilment of personal potential. This perfectly links with the ‘self-actualisation need’ that Maslow (1987) suggests, which refers to ‘people’s desire for self-fulfilment, namely, the tendency for them to



become actualised in what they are potentially' (1987: 22; cf. Goldstein, 1939). Meanwhile, as the teacher is the official administrator of the course, students' course-related opinions embody their expectations of their teacher as well. This aspect has already been made apparent earlier when I discussed students' concern about my personal qualities. Here at this point, this kind of concern can be further explained by students' eagerness for their own development.

#### **7.1.1.3.2 Perceived importance/benefits of this module**

11 participants talked about how they understood the importance of the module of 'Advanced English Reading' (also named 'Intensive Reading' in this research context). These students seemed to recognise its importance explicitly, no matter whether this recognition was truly their own or indoctrinated by others. The following two examples can show students' understandings at different levels:

'The main content of this course is explaining texts, which is helpful to improve our reading comprehension ability. The process of understanding plays an essential role no matter in listening/speaking or in translating. It's particularly important for us to understand the westerner's way of thinking and writing. Therefore, I'm very interested in your analysis of complex sentences, of coherence between paragraphs, and of the structural development of a text.' (S9, Class 1, translation)

'No matter how, I think this course is very important, I must come no matter if I can get something from the class. Your method to explain text I like it very much, because I can understand it after listening to your explanation.' (S3, Class 2, original)

The first student seemed to have more comprehensive reasons to take this module. She initially interpreted the course value on behalf of the class group as a whole by using 'our' or 'us', but then listed a few things that she herself was motivated about.

In other words, she seemed to have identified with the personal importance of studying this module. Similar identification could be seen from the second student's statement as well, although we cannot see how she came to understand such importance. Fortunately, these two participants both appreciated the quality of my teaching, in which case it is reasonable to believe that their motivation at 'identification' level could be well protected and positively promoted (Ryan and Deci, 2000). On the other hand, if their experience of learning this course did not match their expectation at all, gradually they would lose the sense of value that they initially perceived and accepted (ibid).

To conclude at this point, I have analysed and discussed three groups of motivational components (which were respectively specific to 'teacher', 'learner', and 'course') based on the participants' reasons for attending my class. To some extent, these three types of components interact with each other and among themselves in a dynamic way, and therefore there is no single reason that can explain students' complex motivation for learning (English as well as other things). It should be made clear that the purpose of analysing these reasons was to find out what *could* possibly motivate students to come to class which is the main language learning context in China. Meanwhile, exploring the broader contextual factors will further help to understand Chinese learners' motivation for tasks as well (Dörnyei, 2002).

7.1.2 Reasons for skipping class

From the same 117 letters, I identified the following themes in terms of students' reasons for skipping class (see Table 7-3 below). Similar to Table 7-1, these themes were ordered according to the number of students who mentioned each, and the sum total was more than 117 because some students gave more than one reason. It was interesting to note that the reasons were not only brought up by those absentees, but also by some regular attendees. Therefore, the purpose of analysing these reasons was to get an idea of what things *could* possibly demotivate students to come to this English class, although it did not necessarily mean that they lacked the motivation to learn English. Here is the table.

Reasons	Frequency
Busy with postgraduate exams	29
The course and course book	23
Conflicts with students' personal plans/arrangements/learning habits	20
Final-year/graduate pressure	18
Unsatisfactory aspects of my teaching quality/methods	17
Fighting for seats, getting up late, or other disturbance	12
Busy seeking jobs, pursuing other certificates	10
Previous experience of learning this course with other teachers	10
My 'connivance' of students' absence	6
Unsuccessful start of the term	6
Pressure from peers/broader environment	5
No interest/confidence in learning English	4
My change/contrast with their first-year impression of me	3

Table 7-3: Reasons for skipping class

Further analysis of these emerging themes led to the following classification (see Table 7-4). Similar to Table 7-2, all these demotivational components could be categorised into three groups which respectively focused on the teacher, the learner,



and the course. The interesting difference is that *teacher-specific* motivational components were the major reasons for students' attendance, whereas *learner-specific* demotivational components became the major reason for their absence.

<b>Learner-specific demotivational components</b>	<b>Internal factors</b>	
	◆ postgraduate exams and other learning plans	49
	◆ Busy seeking jobs, pursuing other certificates	10
	◆ No interest/confidence in learning English	4
	<b>External factors</b>	
	◆ Final-year/graduate pressure and peer pressure	23
<b>Course-specific demotivational components</b>	◆ Fighting for seats, getting up late, or other disturbance	12
		(98)
	◆ The course and course book	23
	◆ Previous experience of learning this course with other teachers	10
<b>Teacher-specific demotivational components</b>		(33)
	◆ Unsatisfactory aspects of my teaching quality or methods	17
	◆ My 'connivance' of students' absence	6
	◆ Unsuccessful start of the term	6
	◆ My change/contrast with their first-year impression of me	3
		(32)

Table 7-4: Classification of students' reasons for skipping class

7.1.2.1 Learner-specific demotivational components

98 out of 117 participants' reasons for skipping class were counted as learner-specific demotivational components which could be further analysed from *internal* and *external* perspectives. Internal factors mainly included the conflicts between attending class and pursuing their personal academic/career goals. For some participants, some goals might be initially imposed on them or set under others'

influence. However, I still considered them as internal reasons because they seemed to have accepted these goals anyway and perceived them personally relevant. External factors were primarily concerned with the unfavourable conditions of the learning environment or the adverse influence of the broader context (Williams and Burden, 1997; see Table 3-3).

#### **7.1.2.1.1 Internal factors**

**Firstly**, there were 49 participants who stated that they were fully engaged in working for their own academic goals most of which referred to taking the forthcoming postgraduate entrance exams. Though English is a compulsory subject for every prospective exam taker no matter what Master's course they were going to apply for, they were still not motivated to attend the English class, because what was taught was not thought to be particularly relevant or helpful to their exams. This was understandable because different universities prescribed different reference books for their applicants to 'study' by themselves. By 'study', here it involves two learning approaches that the exams in question require applicants to adopt. That is, students are supposed not only to 'comprehend the meaning' of the reference books but also to be able to 'reproduce' them in examinations (Richardson, 1994: 463, cited in Kember, 2000: 99). In Kember's (2000) words, 'understanding' and 'memorisation' are both needed. Moreover, it is widely believed by Chinese students that doing relevant exercises is more effective in preparing for certain exams, though this does not mean the normal classes are totally useless. It could be seen that some of my

students were fairly willing to attend the class but unfortunately had to give it up due to time conflict and exam pressure.

*Time conflict* was mainly reflected in students' overall self-study plans. As I have introduced earlier, this module required 6 class hours per week and some extra time for previewing and reviewing, which was apparently too much for some students to afford under that special circumstance. Here are some students' explanations in this regard:

'It's not because we don't want to come to class, but because many of us are applying for non-English postgraduate courses. English is not a big problem; but other professional reference books are completely new to us and therefore take us more time to study on our own.' (S2, Class 1, translation)

'Taking exams needs practical skills rather than the ability to appreciate texts in the way we do in class. Spending six hours per week learning one particular article seems not as effective as doing 20 sets of reading comprehension exercises within the same amount of time.' (S35, Class 2, translation)

'I want to choose finance as my major for the further education, so I have to learn the courses by myself, and sometimes attend the relative classes in other department. So I have no choice.' (S30, Class 1, translation)

In addition, some participants' personal learning habits resulted in the time conflict between attending class and self-studying as well. As a few of them wrote:

'I have a lot of things to learn by heart for the postgraduate exams. I particularly like reading by myself in the fresh air, especially in the morning. Hence, I had to sacrifice some of your class time.' (S46, Class 1, translation)

'At first I attended class continuously. I also found it really worth attending. Gradually I found that if I attended this class one day, I felt the efficiency of my study, the whole day, is low, and I was not satisfied about myself. Just like an engine, while it is working, you



stop it, it needs time to start again. If I have a day without lessons, my efficiency is high. You needn't go around here and there to find seat.' (S24, Class 2, original)

'I hope to have some clear days studying on my own. There would be little time left if I attended your class for two hours in the morning.' (S36, Class 2, translation)

It could be seen from the above six comments that many students tended to work according to their own schedule in the way they were most comfortable with. Clearly, the timetable established by the university and the teacher's particular lesson plan were not able to satisfy every learner's personal needs. As Jiménez Raya and Lamb (2003) point out, 'the fact that there is no easy one-to-one relationship between teaching and learning makes it virtually impossible for a teacher to set learning objectives for a class and expect learners to achieve uniformly by the end of the lesson' (2003: 14). In a sense, this can be a challenge for educators because they want to encourage learners to set and strive for their own goals with autonomy on the one hand, and expect them to follow the school curriculum on the other.

Besides the specific reason of time conflict, the general *exam pressure* demotivated some participants as well. For example, a student said she had no passion for class at all because it had been ruined by the piles of reference books that she needed to study for postgraduate exams. Another one said she changed her self-image as a good student in teachers' and peers' eyes because she skipped all possible classes since the third year to prepare for her postgraduate exams. Even if sometimes she presented herself in class for the sake of attendance record, she could not concentrate at all.

Apart from the great majority who skipped class by reason of preparing for postgraduate exams, a small number of participants also mentioned their other learning plans such as reading other interesting books in the library, practising oral English by themselves, or learning to educate themselves. Here are a couple of examples:

‘I’m practising my oral English as often as possible. Let me give you an example. If I have two hours’ free time, I would rather find a foreign teacher and chat with him than study in our book. I do things which I think is worth my while doing it.’ (S27, Class 2, original)

‘I have spent three years in studying by attending class at university, and till now have no sense of achievement. Therefore I want to make use of the rest of time to learn to educate myself. Learning, after all, is a lifelong process, and you can’t always rely on the teacher.’ (S18, Class 2, translation)

**Secondly**, 10 participants stated that they had to skip classes as they were busy seeking graduate jobs or pursuing job-related certificates which might or might not have anything to do with English. These reasons were seen as internal factors because these students perceived that the value of attending my class was not particularly relevant to their job-seeking goals, and they had realistic awareness of what was needed for these goals (Williams and Burden, 1997, see Table 3-3). Similar to the first internal factor discussed above, this one also brought along the problem of time conflict, as the students wanted to have more time to develop some practical skills and knowledge for work use. As the following students explained:

‘The seniors are all busy for their postgraduate exams or other certificate exams or looking for a good job. Next month, I have to take an exam which have nothing to do with English. So I have to choose the one which is more urgent for me.’ (S21, Class 1, original)

‘If our English level have achieved a certain degree, it is hard for us to achieve more.

We should also pay more attention to other subjects, especially Japanese. If we can learn the Japanese or German as good as English, it will be easier for us to get the master degree or find a good job. Millions of people in our country can speak English, so it's a common thing. If we want to do something that other people cannot do, we should have the knowledge that other people do not know.' (S37, Class 1, original)

'I think the most important to me is listening, speaking, and some other practical skills like computer and so on. So these days I'm busy remedying my disadvantages, which may be useful in the future work. I understand the class is necessary, but the vocabulary and some other knowledge are not useful in the work to me.' (S26, Class2, original)

These statements showed that students had their own judgement of class value in terms of personal relevance. As Kember (2000) found in his research with Asian students, 'a course should both stimulate intrinsic interest and display a relevance to future career needs...' (2000: 113). In addition, my students were also aware of their personal strengths and weaknesses in skills required and expected, according to which they made their own plans for personal improvement. Indeed, the classroom is not the only place for students to learn and develop; what is taught in class is not the only thing that students expect to obtain either. It could be seen that my participants did have motivation to learn, but not necessarily English; or they had motivation for learning English, but not necessarily in the way that we did in class.

The **third** internal factor, mentioned by only four students, was comparatively easier to explain as it represented a kind of extreme: that is, having no interest or confidence in learning English or this course, which is known as 'amotivation' in Deci and Ryan's (2002) self-determination continuum (see Table 3-1). In this research, it was important to note that some students' lack of interest was not only



the initial reason for disliking learning English, but also the result of their previous English learning experience. As the following couple of students wrote:

‘Nearly four years’ English learning experience at university made me less and less confident, my poor written and spoken English deprived me of opportunities to participate in class.’ (S57, Class 1, translation)

‘I’m not a qualified English major from the beginning to the end. When I was a freshman, I realised my English was too poor compared to other classmates especially girl students. I didn’t know how to learn English. Three years have passed; there is little improvement in my English. I now know I don’t fit to study English. I don’t like it. So I determine to attend graduate school and choose another major. After all, English is only a kind of tool, I have to learn some other skills and gain some different experiences.’ (S21, Class 2, original)

From an English teacher’s perspective, I was a bit disappointed to see my students’ lack of interest in learning this language. But on the other hand, I was gratified as they seemed to have a clearer self-concept and learned to strive hard for things that they thought worthwhile.

#### **7.1.2.1.2 External factors**

Among the 35 students whose reasons were considered as external, 23 of them mentioned pressure. I have talked about postgraduate exam pressure earlier from internal perspectives, as I felt that pressure was mainly from within the learners in their hard work for their goals (although it was partly from outside as well). By contrast, the external pressure addressed by students here was more from their peers and broader contexts such as the final-year/graduating situation and their perceived social expectations (Williams and Burden, 1997; see Table 3-3). When they brought up these reasons, most of them seemed to speak on behalf of the final-year students

as a whole. As regards the low attendance rate, they tended not to attribute it to me or themselves, but to the fact that they were in a special period. As the following two students wrote:

‘Our skipping class was not because of you, but because of the current situation. Everybody has limited time and therefore has to deal with more urgent things and leave other things aside. If you were not teaching final-year students, things must be different.’ (S17, Class 1, translation)

‘We are in the final year now and have so many things to do. Learning has become very utilitarian at this stage. I never think this is what university students are supposed to be, but have to accept the fact.’ (S35, Class 1, translation)

Peer pressure was another salient reason behind some students’ absence from class. It could be seen that not every student had strong intention to skip class at first, even though they were also busy with various things. However, when seeing many others do so, they seemed to feel that they lost much time due to attending class. It was the invisible competition among learners that pushed them to ‘follow the trend’. As a few students stated:

‘Almost all students who are taking postgraduate exams don’t come to classes now, including some of those whose applied master’s course is still English. Under such circumstance, I become very upset and anxious.’ (S4, Class 1, translation)

‘Another reason is the great pressure! I don’t want to go against the trend. Since so many students feel free to skip some classes, why can’t I? I also just want to take the relevant courses instead of all. During such a special period, I need to deal with the most important thing with my full energy.’ (S50, Class 1, translation)

‘People who always skip classes seem to have more free time for postgraduate exams preparation, which unavoidably give others a lot of pressure. Gradually many of us start to follow their steps.’ (S52, Class 1, translation)

The second learner-related external factor which demotivated them to attend class was regarding the constraints and limitations of the learning environment, as well as some other contingencies beyond their control. At least five students mentioned the problem of competing for seats in the library. Due to the limited number of seats in the self-study room, they had to get there early in the morning to find a quiet and comfortable place, and were worried about losing it once they left. Another 4 students explained that they missed some classes because they got up late after burning the midnight oil. Unexpected contingencies turned out to be a demotivational factor for some students as well. For example, a student said something unfortunate happened to her family which made her upset and depressed during those days, and therefore unable to concentrate on any classes. All in all, we should be aware that student motivation is not only determined by proper and significant reasons such as pursuing learning/career goals, but also affected by seemingly trivial and incidental things such as their physical/psychological comfort (Maslow, 1970).

#### **7.1.2.2 Course-specific demotivational components**

Course-specific reasons have been discussed as motivational components in 7.1.1.3, in terms of the importance of attending class and of this module perceived by 22 participants. Here in this section, demotivational components specific to the course will be discussed, including 23 participants' negative comments on the textbook as well as 10 participants' dissatisfactory learning experience with previous course



tutors.

Students' complaints about the textbook were mainly regarding its content and uselessness. In general, the texts were thought by most students to be 'boring, difficult, out of date, lengthy, abstract, and time-consuming'. As the following two students wrote:

'I attended your first four classes. The first sight I saw the text, it made me afraid. It's too long and too many new words and complicated sentence structures, I have no time to conquer it.' (S21, Class 2, original)

'It's all due to the god damn book. This is my fourth year here, I can't afford the time studying in this kind of book which in my mind and many foreign teachers' mind as well is a completely bullshit. They said, 'the book is boring, how can a teacher teach it interesting?' even the foreign teachers can't understand some expression in our book which they will not use in their whole life. So why bother.' (S27, Class 2, original)

In addition, this course was thought to be 'useless' as it was neither relevant to their postgraduate exams nor practical for their daily use of this language. For example:

'We choose to study by ourselves in the face of so many books appointed by our target universities. What we learn in the intensive reading class might not be useful for the postgraduate exams. We are forced to be 'short-sighted' and 'practical' by the examination system.' (S29, Class 1, original)

'Our textbook is out of date so that it cannot attract students' eyes. The article selected are full of clichés and the cold words are seldom used in daily life even in the TEM 8.' (S20, Class 2, original)

In 3.3.2.1, I have mentioned the framework of four motivational conditions proposed by Keller (1983) and further highlighted by Crookes and Schmidt (1991). Based on Keller's (1983) theory, Crookes and Schmidt (1991) clearly explained the four major

determinants of motivation—interest, relevance, expectancy, and outcomes (for details, see 1991: 481-482). In the present research, these four criteria could help explain why some of my participants were not satisfied with this course. Clearly, they were demotivated by the course because none of these criteria was met according to their awareness of personal needs, values, and goals. Specifically speaking, they were not interested in the textbook and did not perceive its importance or relevance. They were not confident in studying this course well because they expected it would require much of their time and effort due to its level of difficulty. Finally, they could not experience the intrinsic rewards (such as enjoyment) and seemed not very concerned with the extrinsic rewards (such as good marks) either, as they had strong determination to pursue their own goals instead. Actually, this issue seems fairly common in many other educational settings as well. As Lamb and Simpson (2003) once point out when talking about practitioner research and professional autonomy, ‘...the issue of external constraints (such as imposed curriculum)...might be the major factor contributing to disaffection in both learners and teachers’ (2003: 61).

Apart from the demotivational influence caused by the textbook itself, some participants’ negative attitudes towards this course were also related to their experience with previous course tutors. I did not put this factor into the group of teacher-specific reasons, as I have defined that group in terms of comments relating specifically to me as a teacher, rather than teachers in general. At this point, I am

mainly concerned about how their attitudes towards relevant teachers affected their attitudes to this course, which further influenced their motivation to attend my class afterwards.

Good teachers can motivate their students to become more devoted to their subject (Dörnyei, 1994); likewise, unsuccessful teachers may unfortunately ruin students' interest and confidence in learning their subject. As the following students complained:

‘I haven’t made enough efforts on this course for a long time, as I was so disappointed with our previous teacher who taught it that I even started to hate this course because of him. Till now I have no confidence to pick it up again.’ (S3, Class 1, translation)

‘I think it’s too late to have you back. We’re almost leaving. We’re totally disappointed with all the teachers who had been teaching us. They all had their ways to disappoint their students. I think the time left is too short to let us accept your methods of teaching.’ (S23, Class 2, original)

In a sense, students' dissatisfaction with their teachers had something to do with the frequent change of teachers as well; and there are some contextual constraints underlying this phenomenon in this university, as I have explained in 1.3.1. Perhaps those teachers were not that problematic, but simply taught in different styles which took time for students to get used to. I also wondered whether the students had rather negative feelings towards the new teacher or not. It is anyway important for the administrative body to be aware that learners may need a feeling of consistency and stability when pursuing a course of study.



### 7.1.2.3 Teacher-specific demotivational components

In 7.1.1.1, I discussed teacher-related reasons brought up by 76 students from a motivational perspective. Here in this section, 32 students' comments on me and my class will be discussed from a demotivational perspective. As indicated earlier, those who made positive comments included both attendees and absentees. Likewise, some of the negative comments to be discussed in the following were made by regular attendees as well. It seemed that some participants not only explained their own reasons for attending or skipping classes, but also tended to make comments on behalf of their class fellows as well.

**Firstly**, 17 students pointed out the *unsatisfactory aspects of my teaching*, including teaching methods, class atmosphere, teaching speed, and my personal style which seemed related to my personality (such as quiet and mild) and physical condition (such as low voice). Regarding teaching methods, at least five participants talked about it in connection with 'tasks/activities' which they thought were part of my new method. They did not tend to deny the value and usefulness of tasks, but somehow felt such new methods were from overseas and therefore not suitable for the Chinese context. Here are two examples:

'Why people don't want to come? My point is that they think it is a good class if they are crammed with a lot of things rather than enjoyed new activities, new methods. Due to traditional Chinese educational system, our brain has actually become a receptacle rather than a thinking tool or an analysing machine.' (S28, Class 1, original)

'Face it my dear friend, this is China. We can't find a way to combine the present

educational situation with a teaching method from overseas. I know you are trying very hard.’ (S23, Class 2, original)

Comments like the above were not widely found among my students’ letters, though they might represent a larger population’s opinions. It seems to be a widespread perception that most Asian students are used to ‘didactic teaching’ and ‘passive learning’ in the ‘tightly structured courses’, hence the ‘resistance to innovation’ (Kember, 2000: 111-112). However, as Kember (2000) further claims based on the successful Action Learning Project conducted in Hong Kong, students’ initial resistance may eventually be replaced by their appreciation if they are allowed time to adapt to new forms of teaching and learning. This was the case in my research as well, as I found that not all of the regular attendees felt comfortable with my way of dealing with texts at the very start. Nevertheless, they stayed on and gradually came to enjoy it once they got used to my teaching methods.

Apart from teaching methods, a few participants thought my personal style could make my teaching problematic. For example, a student said she sometimes felt sleepy because I was too gentle and mild. Another student said explicitly to me that if I wanted to be an excellent teacher, then my quietness was not good for me. For them, the main problem of my quiet nature was that the class atmosphere would not be lively, active, or full of passion. Similarly, my low voice did not help in this regard either. Here is a typical example from a girl who explained how my quiet voice made her ‘escape’ from my class:

‘The last reason is about you. Our classes are always in the first half of the day. Your voice is very small that if you want all of us to hear you, you keep moving steps in the classroom. Most of the time we looked at you moving from this side to the other, which made me feel a little faint. Then the following day was spent in this way. I think it is my fault. Instead of give you this kind of suggestion, I chose to escape from this course.’ (S20, Class 1, original)

**Secondly**, in addition to my personal limitations, my understanding and empathy were somehow ‘used’ by some students and regarded as my ‘*connivance*’ with their absence from class. At the beginning of the term, I did declare that I would not force anyone to come to my class, though I was at the same time encouraging their attendance by stressing the importance and potential usefulness of this course. As a result, this became a sign for some of them to have their own way without worrying about external regulations from me or anything like that. There were six students who made comments in this aspect, from which I could see that they appreciated my understanding on the one hand, and felt guilty of taking advantage of my goodness on the other. As the students stated:

‘We know what we need to learn, what we need to do, we do care about our own futures. It’s bad for one teacher to force his students to do something sometimes. He is wasting our time. So thank you. Thank you very much for giving me the time to do my own things. It’s very great, and you are very great.’ (S59, Class 1, original)

‘I heard my classmates told me they felt guilty. You still smiled to them, say ‘hello’ to them when they met you and even they absent from class.’ (S55, Class 2, original)

**Thirdly**, ‘*unsuccessful start of the term*’ was mentioned by 6 participants as something demotivating. This was mainly my fault as I went back late from the UK and missed nearly two weeks’ classes. A couple of periods of leave that I asked for afterwards made things even worse. Despite some misunderstandings, I was terribly



sorry for this and truly understood how disappointed my students were while waiting for me in the classroom. Unfortunately, I would not be able to make time return to the past and start again; but fortunately, I had this chance to communicate with every individual student by writing. It was a chance for my students to voice their true feelings, whether to express disappointment or to complain; and a chance for me to remove misunderstandings and express my apology. Anyway, this unexpected experience made me further aware that learners come to class not only to be taught and educated, but also to be cared and respected. The role that a teacher plays is not only to give knowledge and demand discipline, but more importantly to demonstrate a way of being a responsible and caring person. This seems to be a typical image of Chinese teachers, as they are expected to be a ‘model’ not only of ‘authoritative learning’, but also of ‘moral behaviour’ (Jin and Cortazzi, 2006:10).

The **final** teacher-specific demotivational component was regarding their *perceived changes in me* compared with their first impression of me three years before. In a sense, my students had already had specific expectations of me before I went back to teach them the second time, based on their knowledge of the former me. Therefore, they naturally hoped that our previous happy class experience would continue. Moreover, it seemed that only my changes in their expected direction were acceptable. Anything that I did not do better than or as well as before would make them disappointed and even become a demotivational force. Although this aspect was mentioned by only three participants, it should not be ignored, because it

reminds us of the important influence of learners' previous learning experience on their later learning motivation, as well as the influence caused by the mismatch between what learners expect in their minds and how they feel in reality.

## **7.2 Further discussion**

So far I have analysed my research participants' letters to me in detail. This improvised investigation was ostensibly to find out why my students came or did not come to attend my class, but actually functioned as a valuable way for me to understand their underlying motivation for learning and for other things. Having played dual roles as a teacher researcher, my personal and deep involvement in this authentic teaching context has increased my understanding of the complexity of not only the construct of motivation but also the life of the classroom.

To give a broad overview of the above discussed themes, there are three salient aspects that are worth further discussion. The first one is the significance of the teacher-student relationship in terms of teaching and researching. The second one reveals students' motivational conflicts in connection with their goal prioritisation.

The third one looks at learners' motivational and personal development in the face of the challenge of time and context.

## **7.2.1 Significance of teacher-student relationship**

### **7.2.1.1 In terms of teaching<sup>6</sup>**

Teaching in the classroom is a complex job which is both academic and social in nature. As Dörnyei (2005) says, ‘the classroom, is also a social arena in which students go through some key developmental experiences in their lives, such as establishing friendship, falling in love, and experimenting with increasingly elaborate personal identities’ (2005, 86-87).

In the socially constructed world of teaching, the teacher-student relationship is crucial. This relationship is by no means like that between ‘seller’ and ‘buyer’, or between ‘giver’ and ‘taker’. In a sense, it seems like the feelings between family members which need ‘watering’ and ‘nourishing’ with full attention and which will finally be paid back. In the present research, the classic image of the relationship of ‘filiality’ in Chinese culture seemed less typical in my class. On the contrary, ‘the reciprocity of caring, concern and cherishing’ (Jin and Cortazzi, 2006: 12) which also characterises the teacher-student relationship in Chinese tradition proved to be more important and was highly appreciated by both parties. On the one hand, students need to have a feeling of being cared for and attended to by the teacher, no matter how mature they are. For example, these needs could be seen from how my research participants felt about the class size. As some of them said, they liked the atmosphere

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<sup>6</sup> This part is adapted from Li, 2006



of a small class because they could feel more connected with the teacher and peers, which in turn would motivate them to devote themselves to their learning. On the other hand, the students are always ready to ‘help’ the teacher as well by showing their understanding, support, appreciation and encouragement. For example, when some of my participants explained their reasons for absenting themselves from my class, they tended to comfort me, encourage me, and prevent me from blaming myself for the low attendance rate. Here are some examples:

‘In fact, we have discussed about why we don’t like to take classes this semester in bed time. Though there are several reasons, none of them is related with the teacher. So you need to realise this phenomenon is not your fault. Partly it is our fault, partly the situation.’ (S20, Class 2, original)

‘Please don’t be sad about the small number of students present in your class. You know, no matter there are 60 students or just one in the class, you should always see it as a stage on which you may perform to the full extent.’ (S35, Class 2, translation)

‘Miss Li, please don’t feel sorry about the low attendance rate during these days. When we get together in a few years’ time, there must be a room of elitists among us. At that moment, you’ll be happy and proud, because it was your understanding and love that made them feel warm and encouraged them to pursue their dreams. (S61, Class 1, translation)

These words made me realise that I might have underestimated their maturity and sensitivity. Though feeling depressed for some reason at times, I had been trying to hide my emotion very carefully in front of my students. However, they seemed to have observed me even more carefully. I was touched and firmly believed that such a gesture was more than a matter of trying to please me or get a good mark. Rather, it should be attributed to mutual trust and understanding between us, which is the beauty of the social life in the classroom.

Despite the motivating effects of the positive teacher-student relationship, it is also important for the teacher to bear in mind the administrative role that she should play. A teacher should be very careful of the balance between being ‘empathic’ (Dörnyei, 1994) and authoritative, between encouraging autonomy and demanding discipline. It is helpful to ‘promote learner autonomy by allowing real choices about alternative ways to goal attainment’ (Dörnyei, 1994: 282), but excessive autonomy might to some extent lead to overindulgence or damage to the normal teaching system. All in all, how to manage the proper teacher-student relationship requires both technical strategy and social consideration. A healthy and effective relationship will indeed promote learner motivation and help teaching go in a more smooth way.

#### **7.2.1.2 In terms of researching**

In the present research, the sensitive relationship between me (the researcher) and my students (the participants) had a great influence on the research process and brought some unexpected results as well. In view of our shared history, I found my attitudes toward teaching and toward the research was somehow contradictory. Before the fieldwork started, I had great ambition to conduct my research successfully, with confidence in the research instruments that I had designed. However, once I stepped into the classroom, it was not easy to be clearly aware of my identity as a researcher, especially in front of the students who knew me very well. For ethical reasons, I always considered the classroom situation from a teacher’s perspective first. Whenever I felt my prepared research plan was not welcome or somewhat

time-consuming, I would be unwilling to carry on, thinking that I should not ‘waste’ my students’ time or ‘use’ them for my personal research purpose. The low attendance rate made me more sensitive of whatever I did in class, as I did not want to disappoint the limited number of students who chose to attend my class. Although I believed that carrying out some research activities (such as doing tasks and writing feedback) would do no harm to their study, I would still not like to force them to accept my research beliefs if they themselves were not able to perceive things in this way.

In spite of some ups and downs in the process, this research did move forward, with the improvised methods that I adopted according to the ever-changing situation. My concern with the teacher-student relationship might have caused some unnecessary anxieties within myself; but meanwhile, the research benefited from the positive effects of our carefully maintained relationship as well. The quality of my students’ letters to me was a good example in this regard. As I have explained, we had used this way of communication when I taught them for the first time, and it proved successful and reliable. My sincere reply to every individual student helped build up their trust in me and in this method. Therefore, when I invited them to write letters again (which were used as data for this research), I believed they would be responsible and honest in their writing, no matter whether they were showing their respect and appreciation to me or making critical comments or complaints. As it turned out, this part of the data was rich and valuable, thanks to the trustworthy and



well-grounded relationship between my students and me.

## **7.2.2 Motivational conflict and prioritisation**

Apart from the significance of the teacher-student relationship, another salient feature that emerged from an overview of the letters is motivational conflict which seems closely related with students' goal prioritisation, existing within and across learners in different ways.

### **7.2.2.1 Motivational vs. demotivational influence**

In general, the motivational and demotivational influences discussed in the current chapter are from the same three perspectives-- the teacher, the learner, and the course. It was interesting to note that the same factors were sometimes seen by different learners as different influences, either motivating or demotivating. From an internal perspective, this is absolutely understandable because learners have their different needs and goals. Even within the same learner, something motivating could unknowingly become demotivating as he steps into a different developmental stage or has a clearer perception of himself. From an external perspective, different time, situation and different significant others (e.g. teachers) involved may push a learner's different motivations into competition as well.

Taking the present research as an example, the first type of motivational conflict lies across my participants at a macro level. As regards *teacher-specific influence*, they

made different judgements of me and my teaching. Some students appreciated my gentle and mild character; whereas others felt my quiet nature might be a main cause of the inactive class atmosphere. Some students enjoyed the teaching methods that I brought to the class; whereas others thought the methods were western and therefore not suitable for the Chinese context. Some students liked listening to me talk about beyond-textbook things; whereas others did not show much interest as these things seemed to them impractical and irrelevant.

In terms of *learner-specific influence*, they had different motivations for doing the same or different things. For example, some students thought attending class was helpful for them to prepare for postgraduate exams; whereas others thought it was a waste of time and they preferred to study on their own. Facing graduation, some students said they had much pressure and therefore could not concentrate in class; whereas others tried to cherish the limited remaining time at university and release their pressure by studying with peers in the peaceful class.

With respect to *course-specific influence*, students' different attitudes towards the same course book made it either a motivating or a demotivating factor. For example, some students enjoyed studying the difficult articles and had a sense of achievement after making sense of them; whereas others were very frightened by the complex sentences and tough words and had no interest or confidence in studying them at all.

Some students clearly perceived the importance of this course (no matter whether they actually liked it or not); whereas others thought it totally useless.

The above mentioned conflicts not only existed across my participants, but also within them. The fact that a large number of students stated their reasons for both attending and skipping classes could be good evidence in a sense. From what they wrote in the letters, I could see that they did struggle very much in deciding whether or not to come to my class and in fighting between their internal beliefs and external pressure. In Class 1, for example, a student (S35, Class 1) found that final-year students' (including herself) learning behaviours and purposes became very utilitarian. She did not agree with this way of studying, but unfortunately had to follow the trend and face the reality. Another student (S48, Class 1) said she believed this module could help improve her comprehensive ability of using English, but she could not really feel such values at the time of studying. She also believed learning English was very useful, but did not see what its use would be in real work except in teaching and research. There were also quite a few examples in Class 2 as well. A student (S35, Class 2) first stated that she found my way of teaching helped develop her analytical thinking, but later said she needed to do more exercises to improve her English at that stage and therefore felt having six hours of my class every week was not that helpful. Another student (S6, Class 2) said he liked my teaching style and felt no pressure in my class, and at the same time complained that I was too traditional and did not create an active atmosphere.



### **7.2.2.2 Motivation for learning English vs. motivation for other things**

To further understand how different motivations complement or compete with each other within an individual learner; and to see how he prioritises them for a particular behaviour at a particular time, it is necessary to look at these motivational conflicts at a micro level. Basically, motivation prioritisation has a close relationship with goal prioritisation, because a person's motives for doing something are explicitly or implicitly directed by his goals, including 'social relationship goals', 'task-related goals', 'cognitive goals', career goals, and emotional goals (Wentzel, 2000: 106). In the present study, a basic distinction identified within individual learners is motivation for learning English and motivation for other things.

**Firstly**, my participants' general English learning motivation was within my expectation as the research was conducted in an English classroom context. What was worth noticing were the conflicts and coexistence of different specific motives for learning English. Students' letters revealed very strong intrapersonal 'fights' within themselves, for example, between short-term and long-term goals, between learning beliefs and emotional satisfactions, between intrinsic interest and external pressure, between quality-orientated and exam-orientated learning motivation. These varied 'fights' seemed common among many of my students. For instance, some of them were not really interested in English and decided to pursue further education in a different area; but they had to deal with English well at the moment, otherwise

there would be no chance for them to explore their interested areas later. Some students did enjoy English and hoped to appreciate the beauty of this language in their expected way, but the university curriculum and situational constraints were not able to provide them with favourable conditions. Some students were clearly aware of the importance of taking this module, but the actual quality of the class and the textbook seemed unsatisfactory and somehow destroyed their motivation and confidence. Some students believed that learning English not only meant memorising new words or doing exercises, but also required relevant cultural knowledge and the ability to use it in a communicative way. However, the exam pressure and limited self-study time forced them to become ‘short-sighted’ and utilitarian even if they hated being so. Passing exams was not their ultimate aim, but they could not ignore it, otherwise it would become a barrier on the way to their real aims.

**Secondly**, the findings showed that some participants had a variety of motivations for other things apart from learning English, such as social networking, seeking jobs, gaining practical skills, and pursuing all-round personal development. Some of these motivations were complementary or consistent with their motivation for learning English. For example, some students expected that coming to learn English in my class would be a good way of consolidating their social connection with me and their peers. If students realised that improving English proficiency was a key to success in job-hunting, then they would possibly be motivated to attend my (and other) English classes so as to become qualified and competitive applicants. However, some other

motivations might be in competition with students' motivation for learning English. For example, if students were aware of their personal weaknesses in non-English-related skills such as computer skills and other professional knowledge required by certain types of job, they would probably sacrifice their time and energy for learning English for those things. Moreover, excess attention paid to job-seeking (e.g. searching job vacancies, preparing application documents, attending careers fairs) was itself a kind of distraction from concentrating on their normal studies.

Therefore, it seemed not realistic for most of my participants to care about so many things at a time, though it did not mean that different motivations could not coexist. Actually, every student had consciously or unconsciously prioritised these motivations and relevant goals in mind before they were committed to certain actions. In addition, this process of prioritising was an on-going process, being affected by internal factors such as their affective states and developmental stage, as well as external factors such as their interaction with significant others and the contextual realities (Williams and Burden, 1997; see Table 3-3). It might not be possible to come up with a general rule or standard of prioritisation applicable to all learners due to individual differences and the ever-changing situation. However, it is important for us to be aware of and understand our learners' motivational conflicts in the first place, and then try to provide helpful guidance for them to make appropriate prioritisation on their own.



### **7.2.3 Motivational development and personal development**

Motivation is not a stable emotional or mental state, though most relevant research has been based on the measure of it at some particular point of time (Dörnyei, 2001). In the last two decades, a number of researchers (e.g. Heckhausen, 1991; Heckhausen and Kuhl, 1985; Kuhl, 1987; Ushioda, 1998, 2001; Dörnyei and Ottó, 1998) have attached increasing importance to the temporal dimension and suggested the dynamic nature of L2 motivation, in the shape of motivational change and sequential development over an extended period of time. For example, Shoaib and Dörnyei (2005) focus on language learners' long-term motivational moves and shifts in their study (reviewed in 4.1.3.4). Heckhausen (2000) and Smith and Spurling (2001) also adopt a broad lifespan perspective aiming to frame motivational development. Though this aspect is not the primary aim of this research, the 'ups and downs' of my participants' language learning motivation are quite obvious here and there in the gathered data. Basically, the development of their motivation seemed largely related to their personal development, with the developmental stage and situational influence playing major roles.

#### **7.2.3.1 The challenge of developmental changes in motivation**

In EFL contexts such as China, learning English could be a life-long process for some people, covering a number of developmental stages. Take my research participants as an example; they began learning this language from primary school, continued in junior/senior middle school, till university. After graduation, some of

them furthered their English studies in postgraduate schools, and others might have started their jobs having English as a working language at different levels. In whatever way, so long as they are still consciously improving or unconsciously getting more familiar with this language, their learning process is not finished.

Though it seems hardly possible to observe a person's whole life of learning a foreign language, we should not doubt that he has different motivations at different 'life phases' (Shoaib and Dörnyei, 2005). Looking at several key developmental stages of a person—say, child, adolescent, adult learner, working person—we could see that one's motivation to learn a language develops as one grows as a person. Advantages and limitations coexist in a person at every different stage. For example, a child may sometimes have natural interest in a foreign language but lack sustaining efforts and perseverance in learning it; whereas an adult may be very devoted to and skilful in learning, with some instrumental purposes, but unfortunately unable to really enjoy it.

As Shoaib and Dörnyei (2005) find, '...as people's general life goals often develop gradually throughout the years, we can see a sharpening of the focus in language learning orientations as well' (2005: 32-33). From an external perspective, people at different stages face different levels and types of pressure as well as different societal expectations. From an internal perspective, people have increasing awareness of

themselves and therefore their learning may inevitably become more purposeful and utilitarian, in other words more useful for them to live in an expected way in the world. As far as my research participants are concerned, they were at a special developmental stage when the research was conducted. The increasing pressure of graduation might have changed their original learning beliefs and preferred ways of studying English. They seemed more certain about what they wanted and more eager to decide the way to achieve it on their own. Under that circumstance, ‘significant others’ might become less significant compared with their own determination to pursue their desired goals. No matter whether their objectives and behaviours were appropriate or not, I tended to assume that this level of commitment and degree of self-motivation or autonomy would be rarely seen among learners at junior stages.

By saying so, I do not mean that students of younger ages are necessarily less autonomous. They certainly can be as motivated as adults to do the same thing, but probably for different reasons. It seems unlikely for anybody to skip over one developmental stage to the next, physically or psychologically, even if he may have a long-term goal or plan for his future. Sometimes ‘significant others’ (especially teachers and parents) tend to tell the students what is the right way and right reason for them to do something, for the sake of their future. However, not every minor can value the outcome of adults’ experience and some set little store by them. As a result, many people will feel regretful for their previous life when they later reach a certain age or developmental stage and finally realise how wonderful it would be if they had



done things in some ways but not others before. In the classroom context, the typical example of the above issue is the insurmountable distance between the teacher's expectations and the students' beliefs, between the overall aim of the school curriculum and the personal aims of individual students. In this connection, Shoaib and Dörnyei (2005) have identified it as a salient temporal pattern of motivational change, that is, 'maturation' (2005: 31).

### **7.2.3.2 The challenge of contextual influence**

The above discussed challenge of developmental stage to one's motivation is centred on the 'time' element. As time goes by or as one grows up, a person's motivation for something (e.g. for learning a target foreign language) may either develop in a forward direction, or move in a backward direction, or change in a spiral way, or just remain at a relatively constant state for some time. However, the findings of this research seemed to suggest that the 'context' element played a more important part in explaining learners' motivational 'ups and downs'. In other words, the influence of the change of time on one's motivation boils down to the change of situational influence, because humans live and grow in an ever-changing world rather than in a context-free vacuum. In every different day or year, 'human action is always embedded in a number of physical and psychological contexts' (Dörnyei, 2001: 15).

The main data of this research has already implied that my participants' motivation for English has been constantly influenced by various inner and outer contexts such

as their affective states, self-concepts, significant others. the immediate and broader learning environments. In addition, my follow-up email correspondence with a few students further supported this point. After my fieldwork, I have kept in touch with some of my participants via emails. It was one year after they graduated from the university when I asked them a particular question, that is,

‘Looking back at the final year when you were at the university (especially when I was teaching you *Advanced English Reading* course), do you have different understanding of it now? If you were asked to give some advice to the current final-year English majors, what would you say?’

Eight students replied to me. Two of them were doing postgraduate study then, four were working in companies, and two were English teachers. Clearly, answers from different students were more or less different, but with a common tendency of regret for their final year when they could have done better and learned more useful things. Interestingly, their definition of ‘usefulness’ in terms of learning English greatly corresponded with their new identities in the new contexts. It was their different places of work or study that made them realise what things were most needed and should have been obtained more. For example, a student in a company found that the working language (i.e. English) was simple and informal, and it was important to improve oral English and skills of writing business letters. Another student who worked as a translator/interpreter in a different company felt reading skill was important as well, as she sometimes found reading business contracts was quite difficult. A student who has become an English teacher further understood that teaching methods were very important for both teachers and students, and she also

expected that students should trust their teachers and try to cooperate in class. She seemed to regret on behalf of herself and some other class fellows for not doing well in this aspect.

It is no surprise that these students had some new perceptions of English studies as they grew up to enter ‘a new life phase’ (Shoaib and Dörnyei 2005), which might naturally lead to different motivations to learn this language. But in the final analysis, their motivational changes not only resulted from the passing of some time, but more importantly from their involvement in a new physical and psychological context. To put it in another way, it is the different situational influence, both internal and external, that pushed their motivational and personal development.

### **7.3 Conclusion**

This chapter mainly focused on the qualitative analysis and discussion of my participants’ personal letters to me, aiming to further explore their learning motivation by understanding their reasons for attending or skipping my English class. Motivational and demotivational components were identified, which were respectively teacher-specific, learner-specific, and course-specific. Based on an overview of the detailed discussion, this chapter concluded with a general discussion of three noticeable issues—‘significance of teacher-student relationship’, ‘motivational conflict and prioritisation’, and ‘motivational development and personal development’.



So far I have reported this research in detail, from the literature review to the methodological design, from the data analysis to the theoretical discussion. I shall now bring the thesis to the final conclusion in the following chapter, by summarising the entire research, reflecting on my research questions, discussing the limitations and implications, and making suggestions for future research.

## **Chapter 8 Conclusion**

### **8.0 Introduction**

This is the final conclusion chapter of the whole thesis. It begins with a brief overview of the research, and continues with some reflections on the research questions and relevant findings. It then summarises the implications both in the research area and the classroom context, followed by some suggestions for future research. The chapter concludes with a few personal words highlighting what I have achieved and how I have developed as a teacher, a researcher, and a foreign language learner.

### **8.1 A brief overview of the research**

This is classroom-based practitioner research conducted in a university context in China, with myself performing dual roles as a teacher researcher working closely with two classes of final-year English majors (about 120 students in total) for four months. According to my knowledge of that institutional context where I myself studied for four years and taught for one year, ‘tasks’ is a relatively new concept which has not been widely used in English classes, especially on the ‘Advanced English Reading’ course. Therefore, the present research was intended to explore students’ motivation for tasks in this context, and see to what extent tasks can be adapted and integrated into the reading class without abandoning its prescribed textbook or disturbing its existing curriculum provision.

Different from much other task-based research or motivation research, this empirical study is of a qualitative and exploratory nature, with the main research methods being reflective writing and interviewing. In other words, I attempted to understand my students' task motivation and their perceived task effectiveness by listening to their voices, rather than by evaluating their on-task performances or end-of-task products. In order to encourage and guide my students to engage in a systematic reflective practice and increase their awareness of the learning process, I designed a framework (i.e. Expectation-Experience-Evaluation) for both methodological and pedagogical purposes. In addition, I also proposed a 'balanced' approach to my teaching/data-gathering fieldwork, intrigued by van Lier's (1996) call for 'balanced teaching' and Allwright's (1991, 2003) working principles for Exploratory Practice (EP).

As the 'balanced' approach indicates, my fieldwork involved me moving back and forwards between pre-designed and improvised teaching and researching plans. Eventually, I collected a set of qualitative data mainly including my students' written feedback which reflected their immediate perceptions of and comments on different tasks, individual letters which showed their attitudes to and understandings of attending my English class, and group interviews which covered their retrospective task evaluation and other relevant learning issues.



My way of approaching these data was to integrate macro and micro perspectives. At the micro level, I focused on task-specific data (e.g. post-task feedback, interview comments on tasks), aiming to find out the motivating task features, to interpret students' evaluative criteria for motivating tasks as well as the underlying reasons, and to explore in what ways the most immediate task-engagement conditions shaped their task motivation. At the macro level, I extended my focus to wider contexts, that is, to investigate what kinds of contextual factors (such as the course, the university, the society, and the culture) influenced students' broader motivational perspectives which in turn might also shape their motivation for tasks.

Upon reflection, I find that my research perspectives experienced an interesting movement: macro → micro → macro. At the very start, I only had a general interest in language learning motivation. After an extensive reading of motivation literature, I learned that the developmental history of motivation research witnessed a trend from a macro to a micro perspective, especially since the 1990s (Dörnyei, 2002, 2003; Crookes and Schmidt, 1991; Gardner and Tremblay, 1994, etc.). Being particularly interested in the 'situation-specific' approach (Dörnyei, 1996; Julkunen, 1989, 2001) and the educational focus 'looking at classroom reality' (Dörnyei, 1998: 125), I increasingly narrowed my research focus on 'task motivation' which in Dörnyei's words is 'the culmination of this approach' (Dörnyei, 2002: 138). This is the first movement from a macro to a micro perspective. However, in the process of researching task motivation, especially after I immersed myself in the authentic

classroom situation, I gradually realised the need to bring back the macro perspective into my research. The first several collections of students' post-task feedback revealed a very complex picture of task motivation, which indicated that this concept could not be fully understood without taking the broader motivational influences into consideration. This awareness triggered my modified research methods, especially the idea of communicating with my students via letters which in the end proved to be useful in helping me understand my students' motivation at various levels.

In sum, in line with the 'balanced' approach, my research on task motivation both necessitated and ended up employing macro and micro perspectives in a dynamic way. In the actual process of analysing and interpreting data, both perspectives interacted with and co-supported each other in explaining my students' specific task-engagement motivation, general language learning motivation, as well as broader motivations for other things. In the following sections, I am going to reflect on my research questions and highlight some findings from these two perspectives, based on which the limitations and implications of the research will be discussed.

## **8.2 Reflections on my research questions and findings**

### **8.2.1 Research question 1:**

*What aspects of task design are perceived to be motivating features by English majors in this Chinese university?*

This question corresponds to the first interpretation of the concept of task motivation. That is, when focusing on ‘tasks’, ‘task motivation refers to the characteristics of the task, to task design’ (Julkunen, 2001: 33; reviewed in 3.1). In other words, I was interested to find out the various aspects of task design that could make a task motivating, and more importantly, to see what theoretical and practical considerations the teachers should bear in mind if they intend to employ tasks in their own classrooms. The exploration of this question is necessary because before we attempt to understand why students are motivated for tasks, we should first know what task features they are actually motivated about (or what task features are perceived to be motivating by them). In this regard, I hope to shed some light on the situation-specific considerations of task design, based on what I have found in the present research.

To begin with, I shall talk about the overall idea of integrating tasks into a reading class usually devoid of task-based learning activities. Looking at the context from a macro perspective, I felt that the institutional constraints (such as the large class and the prescribed textbook) and my students’ linguistic expectations as advanced language learners influenced my way of approaching the class and carrying out my research. As Lamb and Simpson (2003) suggest, faced with constraints, teachers ‘need to empower themselves by finding the spaces and opportunities for manoeuvre’ (2003: 62). Out of careful consideration, I decided that my way of using tasks in my English class should neither follow the task-based teaching approach nor the



task-supported one, but stand somewhere in between (reviewed in 3.2.1). Some of the tasks I designed or adapted might not even qualify as ‘tasks’ in a strict sense either. My reason for doing so was to make the most of both the given textbook and the potential benefits of tasks so as to make tasks fit well with the particular learning context. Though in a sense the loosely defined tasks and the insufficient use of task-based framework might be a limitation of this research, I nevertheless found that my adaptation was a meaningful attempt which could increase researchers’ and teachers’ understandings regarding the design and use of tasks in other similar EFL contexts.

From a micro perspective, the specific task features that I was interested in for the research mainly covered four aspects: *task topics, task types, the participatory structure, and the positioning of tasks during the lesson*. My selection of these four aspects resulted primarily from their potential practical implications for teachers in the classroom, which might be different from the focus of most previous task-oriented research in SLA informed by theories such as the Input and Interaction Hypthesis (Krashen, 1981, 1985, 1994; Long, 1981, 1983, 1996) or Levelt’s (1989) model of speech production (detailed summary can be found in Ellis, 2003). Moreover, my exploration of the motivational influences of these four aspects was all based on students’ voices. The lack of systematic observation of their on-task performance was attributed to the contextual constraints, which might in a sense be another limitation. However, my experience during the fieldwork showed that these

four aspects were relatively easier for teachers to adapt according to the different conditions of their own classrooms and could certainly exert great influence on their learners' motivation. For example, teachers can, with certain necessary negotiation with students, decide what topics to use in the task, when to implement which task, and in what way the task should be organised.

In the present research, my students commented that they liked 'interesting, relevant, familiar, attractive, inspiring, useful, authentic, specific, fashionable, and different' *topics*. This finding well supported Ellis' (2003) guiding principles as well as Estaire and Zanon's (1994) 'theme generator' regarding the selection of task topics. In this connection, my students also expressed an explicit need for consistency in studying a course. It implies that the frequent change of teachers may not be helpful for task-based teaching, because an interesting topic is likely to be repeatedly used by different teachers and therefore becomes less motivating. As regards *task types*, my students seemed to like those which can extend their thinking beyond the reading texts, which are called 'opinion tasks' in this research. Comparatively, the other task type (i.e. comprehension/understanding tasks) was less appealing, though students agreed with its usefulness in helping them make sense of the given texts. With respect to '*participatory structure*', the most important and interesting finding is that my students liked the teacher-fronted way of doing tasks most, which challenges the dominant preference for 'group work' in most other research (e.g. Littlewood and Liu, 1996; Chan, 1995; Ellis, 2003). My students' reasons were that teacher-fronted

structure could make the learning activity more targeted and focused, could encourage more inspiring ideas from teacher-talk and teacher-prompted peer-talk. Finally, regarding the *positioning* of tasks, it was found that the pre-reading opinion tasks were most motivating, because these tasks were mostly implemented at an early stage of the lesson or an early point of the day. At that moment, students found themselves more active, energetic, and might have stronger cognitive powers. Moreover, when working at an opinion task on a certain topic before studying the relevant text, students felt they were more ‘open-minded’, otherwise they might be easily influenced by the author’s thoughts once they studied the text.

In sum, the above findings imply that if tasks are to be used in the authentic classrooms, there are some practical factors for teachers to address. Teachers should not only understand how effective a task could be in principle, but also consider the actual conditions and constraints as well as the extent to which they can make the theoretically motivating tasks practically successful. For this purpose, teachers should be aware of their students’ linguistic, cognitive and psychological needs so as to help them make the most of tasks.

### **8.2.2 Research question 2:**

*What are the underlying sources of final year English majors’ task motivation in this context?*

This question corresponds to the second interpretation of the concept of task



motivation. That is, when focusing on ‘task-takers’, the study of task motivation is to explore ‘the motivational basis of language learning tasks’ (Dörnyei, 2003: 14; reviewed in 3.1). Actually, I see this research question as an extension of the first one discussed above, which aims to further explore the reasons why my students perceived certain tasks motivating.

Before discussing the underlying reasons, it is necessary to talk about the possible limitations of the following findings. As I explained in earlier chapters, due to the low attendance rate, the task feedback was only collected from those who attended the class and did the tasks. As the number of the regular attendees was much smaller than the total of students, their opinions might not be able to fully represent the whole class’ opinions. On the other hand, however, it seems reasonable to assume that these attendees were the most motivated learners; hence their opinions could depict a motivating picture for us to understand the sources of task motivation.

Based on students’ post-task feedback and retrospective task evaluation, I identified three major underlying sources of their task motivation. The first one is *academic motivation*, which represents my students’ language learning goals at various levels, ranging from understanding a particular reading text to improving language proficiency in general. It was noted that the majority of the attendees approached the tasks with an intention of gaining cultural knowledge of the target language and

developing language skills such as speaking or writing. To link this motivation with goal theories (reviewed in 3.2.3), it was found that ‘mastery orientation’ was more salient than ‘performance orientation’ among my participants’ attitudes to the module and the tasks. In other words, they tended to focus on ‘learning the content’ rather than on ‘getting good grades, or outdoing other students’ (Dörnyei, 1998: 121; based on Ames, 1992). On the other hand, findings from this research also suggest that when students devoted themselves to some exam-oriented goals (such as taking postgraduate exams), they usually demonstrated a very high level of ‘achieving motive’ which in Biggs’ (1987) words is aiming for ‘highest grades, whether or not material is interesting’ (1987: 11). Therefore, similar to what Kember (2000) found in his study of Asian students, my research findings show that students adopt and change their learning approaches based on the perceived nature and requirement of the learning tasks (such as the course, assignments, examinations), and accordingly demonstrate their different levels of academic motivation (Kember, 2000; cf. Laurillard, 1984; Ramsden, 1984).

The second underlying source is *personal development motivation*, which mainly embodies my students’ broader cognitive goals beyond learning English. In their own words, they expected to ‘broaden their horizon’ and ‘develop their insights’ of the world through the given academic tasks in class. They also hoped to improve their cognitive competence such as thinking and analysing, as well as other transferable skills such as taking initiatives and making decisions. It seems that this motivation is

the main reason which can explain why my students preferred ‘opinion tasks’. Moreover, it was found that, even in the language classroom, most students had a stronger motivation for rounded personal development than for language acquisition. The fact that they appreciated the chance to absorb more thoughts and opinions from the whole class in teacher-fronted tasks is evidence of this and might explain why the potentially greater opportunities to practise their own language skills in pairs or groups seemed less important.

The third underlying source reveals the *affective aspects* of task motivation. As Dörnyei and Kormos (2000) suggest, the examination of ‘non-linguistic and non-cognitive factors’ may constitute a potentially fruitful extension of existing task-based research paradigms’ (2000: 275). According to the data in this research, the emergent theme of affective motivation is best explained in terms of learner satisfaction. It was found that learners’ general satisfaction with tasks linked closely and interactively with the previously discussed academic motivation and personal development motivation. On the one hand, learner satisfaction flowed from their engagement in those tasks which could promote their linguistic, cognitive and other aspects of self-improvement. On the other hand, affective experiences of satisfaction might in turn facilitate their effective learning and development in the above aspects. Moreover, this satisfaction would be strengthened by physical and psychological comfort that a favourable task situation could provide. It was also found that the teacher and the proper class size were important factors in exerting affective



influence on learners, in view of learners' psychological needs for 'relatedness' (Ryan and Deci, 2000). To understand this from 'a goal content perspective', as Wentzel (2000) suggests, students in the classroom are likely to have various 'social relationship goals such as to gain approval from others, to establish personal relationship with teachers or peers, or to cooperate with classmates' (2000: 106).

In sum, the coexistence of the above three underlying sources reiterates that task motivation is very complex, perhaps even more so than has been found under 'laboratory' conditions. In the authentic language classroom, students are not only learners seeking language development, but also human beings seeking personal development. According to the actual situation, their various goals (such as linguistic goals, cognitive goals, social goals, developmental goals, and career goals) may sometimes complement each other, and other times act in competition. Therefore, in order to understand task motivation within context, we should not only look at the tasks or students' responses to tasks from a micro perspective, but also take a macro perspective to explore the motivational influences of the broader contexts such as the class, the course, the university, the society, and the culture (Dörnyei, 2002: 138). For this purpose, there might be a need to step out of the task situation and explore other broader motivational perspectives.

### **8.2.3 Research question 3:**

*In what ways do the immediate and broader contexts influence students'*

*various motivational perspectives in the classroom, which might in turn shape their task-engagement motivation?*

From question 1 to question 3, my research went through a gradually deeper and wider exploration of task motivation, that is, from the tasks per se to the surrounding contexts and from the motivating task features to the underlying motivational basis. My discussion of the previous two questions has clearly shown that language learners' task motivation comprises different motivational perspectives (e.g. linguistic, cognitive, and affective). Therefore, the third research question is intended to understand how these perspectives take shape under the influence of various situated and broader contextual factors.

In the process of teaching and collecting data, I became more and more aware that looking at task-specific feedback only was not enough, hence I modified my research methods in order to understand broader learning issues that my students might encounter in that context. Considering that the classroom is the most immediate learning environment and attending class should be the prerequisite to their valid task evaluation, I decided to listen to their voices on their attitudes to and beliefs about the class. I asked every student to write me a letter stating the reasons why they came or did not come to my class regularly during that term. These letters turned out to be very helpful for me to understand their various motivational perspectives within and beyond the classroom.

Detailed content analysis of these letters not only made me understand students' reasons for attending or skipping my class, but also pushed me to interpret these reasons with necessary social and cultural considerations. These considerations further helped explain the three identified sources of task motivation discussed in 8.2.2.

Firstly, regarding 'academic motivation' (which is mainly in the shape of language learning motivation among English majors in that context), it was found that my participants' 'developmental stage' (Williams and Burden, 1997) was a crucial factor influencing their motivation for English. That is to say, their special identities as final year students determined their various learning goals, which in turn determined their different approaches to learning English. Some students clearly said that they changed their ways of and attitudes to studying English when they entered the final year, because they had to strive for their goals in their perceived efficient way within limited time. With different purposes (e.g. job-seeking or postgraduate study), students' expectations of my class and the tasks were different as well.

Secondly, it was found that the '*personal development motivation*' demonstrated by those regular attendees had much to do with social and educational expectation in China. Noticing an increasing emphasis on 'quality education' in recent years (Jin and Cortazzi, 2006: 14), students understood that they were expected to develop into



a rounded person. As Kember (2000) says, ‘...there has been traditional value placed upon education for personal improvement and social advancement throughout Chinese societies’ (2000: 114; cf. Stevenson and Lee, 1996). Moreover, university students in recent years may face greater pressure than former students, because their graduation will not be followed by government assignment to work units in a centralised system as before (Jin and Cortazzi, 2006: 7). That is, they have to compete with other graduates in a free job market now. This explains why Chinese students are keen to develop themselves in all aspects in order to stand out in the competition for jobs and be successful in their future positions. Due to the relatively low ranking of this university in China, my participants’ pressure may be even greater because they feel they are in a disadvantageous situation compared with graduates from other prestigious universities.

Thirdly, as regards *affective variables* in task motivation such as learners’ confidence, comfortableness, enjoyment, or pressure, stress, it was found that these psychological states resulted from learners’ interaction with the learning environment (e.g. time of day or size of class), and more importantly with significant others (e.g. teachers and peers) (Williams and Burden, 1997). In this research, the teacher-student relationship between me and my participants had some rather special qualities. For example, the level of intimacy reflected in some students’ letters to me may be uncommon in the western culture. Even within the Chinese culture, ‘the reciprocity of caring, concern and cherishing’ between teacher and student is often overlooked or covered by the

classic image of the teacher as ‘an authoritative parent’ (Jin and Cortazzi, 2006: 12). Another interesting point is that students’ affectionate appreciation of me and enjoyment in my class seemed to have more to do with my personal qualities, temperament, overseas experience, and attitudes towards life than to do with my expertise in English language. This viewpoint is compatible with the Chinese culture in which the teacher is expected to have both professional knowledge and social morality of being a good person.

Overall, the research findings imply that students in the classroom all have multiple goals which are either set by themselves or promoted by others such as the institution (Allen, 1986; Wentzel, 2000). However, the way they prioritise them or the amount of effort they invest in the pursuit of different goals varies from learner to learner, depending on the perceived values and personal relevance of these goals. To a great extent, it is these various goals that shaped learners’ various motivational perspectives. In other words, learners’ goal-setting and goal-commitment play important roles in the motivational processes which fuel the quantity and quality of their learning behaviours (Dörnyei, 2002). In addition, the comparison between my students’ motivational beliefs for learning English before and after graduation also supports the claim of the ‘dynamic’ and ‘evolving’ nature of motivation (e.g. Dörnyei, 2001; Ushioda, 1998). In this regard, this research implies that students’ motivational development arises not only from the passing of time (such as entering a different life phase), but more importantly from the change of the context and their interaction

with the new context.

### **8.3 Overall limitations and implications**

In the previous section, I have mentioned some limitations and implications in terms of the specific research questions and their relevant findings. I will now summarise some key points regarding the general limitations of this research before exploring its wider implications.

Firstly, due to the contextual constraints, this practitioner research on task motivation only adopted a compromised task-based framework and a loosely defined concept of tasks, because the tasks had to be adapted for the existing curriculum and the prescribed textbook in my research context. Moreover, all these tasks were just for one-off use during the fieldwork; and accordingly my participants' comments on particular tasks were only based on their one-off engagement too.

The second limitation regards the data collection methods. In this study, I relied only on students' voices on their perceptions and evaluations of tasks, without making any objective observation (such as recording) of their performance. Therefore, I did not have 'hard' data to examine the quantity or quality of their on-task behaviour or to compare between their performance on more motivating tasks and that on less motivating ones. In other words, this research only focused on what they said about the tasks but not on what they actually did in the tasks.



Thirdly, this research was conducted in a specific context with a group of ‘special’ students. Their shared history with me and their identities as final year students added a few particularities to this study. For example, their previous learning experience with me and later knowledge of my overseas background might have from the very start affected their expectation of my class. Their preoccupation with the preparation for postgraduate exams and the uncommonly low attendance rate had some impact on my teaching/researching procedures as well. Moreover, my dual identity as a teacher researcher might also influence students’ accounts, and it seemed unlikely to clarify to what extent they were pleasing me or telling the truth. For these reasons, I do not attempt to generalise my findings to a wider population or to other contexts. However, this study still has significance and can certainly contribute to our understandings at both theoretical and practical levels.

### **8.3.1 In the research area**

This study suggests that the researcher’s personal involvement in the authentic classroom situation is important for motivation research. It is necessary for researchers to have close and direct contact with language learners for longer time. In this way, the researchers may gain a better understanding and personal experience of the learning environment in which the learners learn a language, based on which they are more likely to interpret learners’ motivation from their perspectives. This will add great value to researchers’ own perspectives in evaluating motivation.

On the other hand, researchers' in-depth contact with their participants will probably make ethical considerations more essential. To be honest, I did have a few tough decisions to make during my fieldwork, especially when I was confronted with the tensions between pursuing my research goals and assuming my teaching responsibilities. I needed to think carefully about, for example, to what extent I should inform my students of my research purposes, how to gather the data I wanted without adding too much extra burden to my students, and how to use the data while showing respect to their privacy. Upon reflection, I feel the idea of 'balanced research' (see 4.3.2) and Allwright's (2003; see 4.3.1) EP principles were useful in helping me manage the tension between working as a teacher and as a researcher. In that particular situation, I realised I should not stick strictly with my original research plan or make my research completely overt, otherwise it might possibly either disturb my normal teaching or weaken the 'authenticity' of my students' behaviours and comments. Instead, I tried to integrate all of my research activities (except for interviews) into my lesson at appropriate points in a natural way. I also convinced my students that what we did in class was for the purpose of mutual understanding and mutual development (according to EP principles).

### **8.3.2 In the classroom context**

This research is an attempt to bring tasks into an advanced reading class which previously gave little space to such a teaching-learning approach, and it proved successful overall. It suggests that a task-based or task-supported approach, which

originates from western education, can be adapted to suit EFL contexts in China without having to reject their original curriculum provision. The prescribed textbook might sometimes be a constraint, but the teacher has some spaces for manoeuvre (Lamb and Simpson, 2003: 62). In some contexts where task-type activities remain a rarity, before encouraging students to accept and benefit from this new teaching method, the teachers themselves should first have an active and positive attitude towards this concept, and be prepared to take initiatives to design, adapt, and introduce it to their classes. Apart from gaining theoretical knowledge of task design from relevant literature, it is also very important for teachers to take into account the contextual and affective factors. For example, they can choose appropriate participatory structures according to the class size and their learning culture; they can decide when to implement the task according to their timetable; and they may select proper task types according to the nature of the module or the textbook. Without underrating the important contributions of the professional task designers/researchers, I believe that the teacher should be the most important person in making a task practically successful in the classroom.

At the practical level, this research also implies that a happy and healthy relationship between the teacher and students could be an effective motivator, and psychologically it is beneficial for both parties. To achieve this aim, frequent and sincere communication is very important. As far as China is concerned, such communication may be insufficient in many university contexts. On the teacher's



part, they normally do not have the obligation to stay on campus except during their teaching time. On the students' part, they may either lack the chance to talk to their teachers after class or for some reason feel it is not easy to approach them. However, my research shows that most students had a strong willingness to communicate with me (e.g. via letters) and to treat me as a friend rather than an authority. They not only wanted me to listen to their voices and understand their concerns, but also hoped to understand me and support my teaching. This kind of mutual care and sharing is indeed valuable. Therefore, I hope every teacher could learn more about their learners and let their learners learn more about them. In order not to make this work become an extra burden for both parties, one of Allwright's (2003) EP principles could be a good suggestion, that is, to 'integrate the work for understanding into classroom practice' (2003: 130).

## **8.4 Future research**

My suggestions for future research arise partly from my awareness of the limitation of the study and partly from the new interest that I developed during the process of conducting this research. Firstly, if conditions permitted, it would be useful to record some students' task performance and analyse the quantity and quality of their task engagement, as Dörnyei (2002) and Kormos and Dörnyei (2004) did in their research. By adding such data to the exploration of students' voices, the results regarding what tasks are perceived motivating and why would be more reliable. Another possible research direction might be to focus on a small group of students in a case study. By

tracing this particular group throughout an extended period of engaging in a series of tasks in an authentic classroom, we might be able to compare their motivations for and performances on different tasks at different points of the entire process. Actually I had this intention at the start of my research but unfortunately the irregular class attendance made it impossible for me to focus on any particular student.

In terms of my developed interest, I mainly find two areas worthy of further research. The first one concerns participatory structures. It is interesting to note that my students appreciated teacher-fronted work much more than group or pair work, which, as I pointed out earlier, contradicts some other research findings or theoretical justification in the literature. As the students explained, they seemed to confront more problems in groups, such as pressure, indifference, lack of confidence, loose focus, or unsustainable engagement. Therefore, I am very interested to know what really happens when learners work together within groups in Chinese university classes; and to find out why this theoretically favourable participatory structure does not work effectively in practice as it is supposed to. Moreover, perhaps we should give more support to ‘teacher-fronted’ structure if it proves suitable for certain classroom contexts.

My second developed interest is about teacher motivation. Much research (including this study) has shown that students’ motivation may be greatly affected by their

teacher, since the teacher is one of the ‘significant others’ (Williams and Burden, 1997). Actually, it should also be the case vice versa, as teaching is a two-way reciprocal operation. That is, students are also ‘significant others’ for the teacher, hence the influence on the teacher’s teaching motivation. Upon reflection, I was clearly aware that my own motivation never remained stable during the fieldwork. As a teacher, I was easily influenced by my students’ attitudes, level of commitment, verbal or behavioural indications of interest or indifference, and even their facial expressions such as smiles or wrinkling foreheads. Therefore, it would be interesting to explore what internal and external factors shape a teacher’s motivation and how the teacher’s teaching motivation influences her students’ learning motivation.

## **8.5 Reflections on my entire Ph.D. study: a few final words**

Reflecting on this three and half years’ of doing Ph.D. research, I would not rate it as an ‘enjoyable’ experience, to be honest. Throughout the journey, I have experienced stress, anxiety, loneliness, financial pressure, intellectual struggle, physical and psychological crisis. However, compared with what I have achieved and learned from this experience, I believe all the ‘sufferings’ are absolutely worthwhile, even if I may have to wait for a few years to feel their real values.

As a novice *researcher* who is for the first time committed to a research project, I am learning by doing. In the process, I have learned to appreciate the ups and downs which challenged my intellect, confidence, perseverance, and finally promoted my



professional and personal development. With still limited research experience, this piece of work is by no means the end or the peak of my research life, but a motivating start for me to strive for further achievement in the academia.

As a young *teacher*, what I have benefited from this research is not teaching methods or skills, but the professional awareness and confidence which have established a good basis for my future career. Teaching is also a profession in which one has to learn by doing; and for this reason, the classroom might be a better place than the library for a teacher to seek improvement. This Ph.D. experience also makes me realise that a good teacher should at the same time be a researcher. She should try to explore her own classroom and seek appropriate ways to solve the puzzles together with her students. The time and effort invested in the research will surely be paid back one day, and the beneficiary will not only be the students but also the teacher herself.

I have emphasised my identity as a teacher researcher throughout the thesis. Actually, I have another important role which is that of a *learner*. Apart from learning to be a teacher and to be a researcher, I have never stopped learning to be an effective language user. On the one hand, my own experience of learning English as a foreign language helps me understand the difficulties that my students confront in their learning. On the other hand, this learner identity always pushes me to consciously

improve my own language proficiency and develop my cultural awareness, especially during my stay in this English-speaking country. All in all, there is no end to learning; and I believe this is true for the language learner, for the teacher, and for the researcher.

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# Appendices

## *Appendix 1: Ten tasks conducted during the experience stage*

### **Task 1 (13/09/04)—Reading and discussion: different ways of doing things (based on Unit 6, Text I)**

#### **Background information:**

This is a comprehension/understanding task carried out at ‘while-reading stage’. The title of this text is ‘How to Get Things Done’. The author writes mockingly about his own procrastination, revealing at the same time some truth about work efficiency. In this story, the author lists five things that he is supposed to do within a week, in a certain order, but it turns out that he finishes them in a different way based on the working principle which he (and perhaps also all the procrastinators) firmly believes in. (This text is attached in Appendix 5.)

#### **Main procedures:**

- ◆ Students were asked to quickly preview the whole text and make sure they got the rough idea.
- ◆ I then asked them to read paragraph 15-18 again, silently and individually, and then discuss two questions in pairs.
  - Question one: what is the third and fourth thing the author actually did?
  - Question two: what is the ‘seemingly good reason’ that the author explained to the reader when he decided to do these things in this order?
- ◆ After the pair discussion, volunteers were invited to report their results to the whole class.



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**Task 2 (08/10/04)—Discussion: objectives of college education (based on Unit 7, Text I)****Background information:**

This is an opinion task at the ‘pre-reading stage’ which involved brainstorming, group discussion and individual oral report. The task topic is revised from the title of this text—‘The Aims of Education’, but has little to do with the real content of the text. The purpose is to lead students to think about this topic in the Chinese context compared with the text which is written by a British author. In this text, the author sets forth his views on education and stresses the narrowness of perspective that he felt characterises much of a university education. (This text is attached in Appendix 5.)

**Main procedures:**

- ◆ Teacher-fronted brainstorming: all the students were encouraged to shout out whatever objectives they could think of. I wrote down the key words on the blackboard. (In total we got 20 objectives on the list, in each class.)
- ◆ I put the whole class into 4-student groups, and asked them to have a discussion and then decide 3 most important objectives agreed by all group members.
- ◆ Each group chose a representative to report to the whole class (around 2 minutes each) about their discussion results as well as the reasons behind their choices. Priority was given to the volunteers as there was no enough time for every group to report.

**Task 3 (13/10/04)—Peer-teaching (based on Unit 7, Text II)****Background information:**

This task involved a peer-teaching session in which I invited a few students to be teachers co-teaching a complementary text: ‘Another School Year—Why?’ The author discusses the difference between ‘training’ and ‘education’, by portraying

vividly some types of student at the university. This is a relatively easy text with a familiar topic so I felt it was appropriate for this task. Volunteer teachers were given two days to prepare their teaching individually and each of them was responsible for one paragraph or two. The rest of the class was supposed to cooperate with these student teachers in studying this text, and at the same time write some comments on their performance. I was sitting among the students as a member of audience, ready to help the teachers out in case they came across problems, as I had promised.

**Main procedures:**

- ◆ Student teachers prepared the lessons before class and then taught one by one following the development of the text.
- ◆ The rest of the students wrote down the comments as much as they liked, and I collected them in the end.
- ◆ I put together all these comments as well as my own opinions after class; and wrote back personally to each student teacher a list of suggestions on their teaching. During the following class, I also led the whole class to review this session.

**Task 4 (18/10/04)—Problem solving: a controversial sexual picture in Liverpool  
(based on Unit 9, Text I)**

**Background information:**

This is a kind of problem-solving task (which may belong to ‘opinion tasks’). The text we were about to study was titled ‘Roots of Freedom’ in which the author introduces the beginning of freedom in Athens and tries to convince the reader that freedom is based on responsibility for the common good. For the discussion purpose in this task, I introduced a BBC TV program as our topic which brought forward a problem for students to solve, from the perspectives of freedom and responsibility.

**Main procedures:**

- ◆ I introduced the programme to students: lately a number of drawings (by a Japanese artist) appeared as decoration along a 50-metre-long street in Liverpool, UK. What aroused the argument was the content of such drawings, that is, the private parts of male and female, nothing else. With different views, people started to discuss whether it was appropriate to put such sexual pictures on a public street.
- ◆ Students were put into pairs to discuss this issue and see how they could solve this problem, using their understanding of freedom and responsibility.
- ◆ The discussion was followed by a teacher-fronted session in which students were invited to shout out whatever ideas they had. I listed them on the blackboard and discussed with the whole class about all these suggestions so as to find out which solution got most support from them.

**Task 5 (20/10/04)—Compare and contrast: the English and American concepts of space (based on Unit 1, Text I)**

**Background information:**

This is a comprehension/understanding task conducted at the while-reading stage when we were studying the text—‘English and American Concepts of Space’—which contrasts the two major English-speaking cultures and concludes that the English and the Americans have been conditioned quite differently with regard to space. This article is neatly structured, thus I wanted students to practise scanning skills before we analysed it in detail.

**Main procedures:**

- ◆ I asked students to read the text silently and as quick as possible. (They had learned the scanning skills in the extensive reading class before.)
- ◆ Students worked in pairs: one pair member was supposed to find out the main features of English concept of space, and the other member the main features of



American concept of space.

- ◆ Students in every pair compared and contrasted each other's information, and then made a list of three major differences between English and American concepts of space.
- ◆ I collected different opinions from a few groups and put a final list on the blackboard, and then discussed these with the class.

**Task 6 (22/10/04)—Picture drawing: to illustrate a textbook story (based on Unit 1, Text II)**

**Background information:**

This is a while-reading task whose purpose is to help students understand a particular part of the target text by drawing a picture themselves. The text—'Private Space'—talks about the German's strong sense of space. The author discusses a particular element of non-verbal communication, describing and analysing the differences between German and American feelings about privacy, and the misunderstanding they may cause. The paragraph based on which the students were supposed to draw the picture goes as follows:

'I was standing on the doorstep of a converted carriage house talking to a young woman who lived in an apartment upstairs. The first floor had been made into an artist's studio. The arrangement, however, was peculiar because the same entrance served both tenants. The occupants of the apartment used a small entryway and walked along one wall of the studio to reach the stairs to the apartment. You might say that they had an "easement" through the artist's territory. As I stood talking on the doorstep, I glanced to the left and noticed that some fifty to sixty feet away, inside the studio, the Prussian artist and two of his friends were also in conversation. He was facing so that if he glanced to one side he could just see me. I had noted his presence, but not wanting to appear presumptuous or to interrupt his conversation, I unconsciously applied the American rule and assumed that the two activities—my quiet conversation and his conversation—were not involved with each other. As I was soon to learn, this was a mistake, because in less time than it takes to tell, the artist had detached himself from his friends, crossed the intervening space, pushed my friend aside, and with eyes flashing, started shouting at me. By what right had I entered his studio without greeting him? Who had given me permission?'

**Main procedures:**

- ◆ I asked students to read this paragraph individually, and then to draw a picture of the house according to the description, paying particular attention to the arrangement of this house as well as the positions of the author, his friend, and the artist.
- ◆ Students were asked to draw individually first and then talk to their neighbours and discuss about their drawings.
- ◆ After discussion, two students were invited to draw on the blackboard and explain their drawings to the class.
- ◆ Finally, I commented on and corrected these two drawings with detailed explanation of this paragraph.

**Task 7 (03/11/04)—Email-writing (based on Unit 4, Text 1)****Background information:**

This is a pre-reading task conducted before we studied the text—‘Style and Purpose’—which is closely related to English writing. The author discusses the importance of using the right word in the right place, that is, to match the style with the purpose of letter writing. In this task, what we focused on was Email writing since nowadays Emails seem more popular and widely used than traditional mails in daily life. For comparison purpose, I collected, before class, a few emails from several native speakers, on the same topics that the students were going to work on.

**Main procedures:**

- ◆ I provided two topics for students to write individually:
  - Write an email asking your tutor (Ben Smith) to write a reference for you because you are applying for an overseas university.
  - Write an email making an appointment with your tutor (Lena Pinks) to discuss your draft of dissertation.

- ◆ One half of the students were supposed to write on the first topic. the other half on the second topic. [10 minutes for writing]
- ◆ I then handed out the photocopied sample emails to students and let them compare with their own so as to see what differences they might find out. [Discussion with neighbours was involved]
- ◆ I led the whole class to compare and analyse these emails, and summarised the common features of the language learners' writings and those of native speakers, trying to make them aware of the differences and possible cultural reasons behind.

**Task 8 (08/11/04)—Discussion: difficulties in English writing (based on Unit 4, Text I)**

**Background information:**

This task is based on the same text as the previous one – Style and purpose. However, it was carried out at the post-reading stage, that is, after we studied the article in detail. The purpose of this task was to help students reflect on the difficulties they often came across when writing in English, and discuss with them about the possible ways to improve.

**Main procedures:**

- ◆ I put students into twos or threes and let them discuss their English writing. Each group was supposed to list three major difficulties that they often came across while writing.
- ◆ I invited several students from different groups to write down their lists on the blackboard. After comparison, I erased the repetitive ones that were brought forward by different groups.
- ◆ To explore these problems, we had a teacher-fronted discussion aiming at the methods accordingly.



**Task 9 (10/11/04)—Compare and contrast: about Railway System (based on Unit 3, Text I)**

**Background information:**

This is teacher-fronted task implemented at the pre-reading stage. The article we were going to study is titled ‘The Subway’. Based on this topic, I talked with my students about the difference between the transportation in China and that in the UK. However, in view of the fact that most of my students might have never seen the real subway because there are not such means of transportation in most cities in China, I decided to focus our discussion on the ‘railway system’ which is more familiar to everyone.

**Main procedures:**

- ◆ I invited students to voice their general impression of the Chinese railway system. I briefly took them down on the blackboard. (It was like brainstorming.)
- ◆ I myself introduced to them what I knew about the British railway system according to my personal experience.
- ◆ Students had a brief discussion with neighbours about the major advantages and disadvantages of both systems, and I made a summary afterwards.

**Task 10 (15/11/04)—Sharing personal experience: living at home or on campus (based on Unit 3, Text II)**

**Background information:**

This is a personalisation task (which may belong to opinion tasks) conducted at the pre-reading stage before we studied the text—Living in two worlds. The author tells us his feelings when living in two totally different worlds—one is his poor family in New Jersey, and the other is Stanford, an affluent university in the United States. I suppose many of my students might have such kind of experience, that is, they stayed on campus in a middle city during term time and went back home which

might be in the poor rural areas during vacations. Even if for some of them, there is not much difference in their living conditions between at home and at university, their feelings of staying with family and with peers might be different as well.

**Main procedures:**

- ◆ I asked students some introductory questions (e.g. During the past three years, did you go back home more frequently or less frequently? How many of you are planning to go back to your hometown to look for jobs after graduation?). Students answered these questions briefly and voluntarily. [For some of the questions, I did not really expect them to answer. I just wanted to get them to think.]
- ◆ Students discussed in twos or threes about how they felt every time when they stayed with family during vacations and why they had such feelings, so as to see if they could find something in common within their groups.
- ◆ Several students were invited to share their experiences with the whole class, followed by my final comments.

Appendix 2: Examples of organised data on tasks

Example: Task 9—about railway system (sample data from Class One)

Translated interview comments (from Group 4)
<p><b>Interviewee 4 (S4):</b> the one with railway station is so real. What's more, we learned some cultural difference between the east and the west. Very vivid.</p> <p><b>Interviewee 3 (S1):</b> I like the one with 'railway system' because I'm interested in the western culture and the life abroad. So when you told us of your own experience there, I felt very interesting.</p> <p><b>Interviewee 2 (S7):</b> when talking about the railway system, you also told us some other aspects of the British transportation, which impressed me a lot. I still remember you showed us several pictures, especially the one when you were standing by the traffic light. And you mentioned the zebra crossing. You said, 'in front of the zebra crossing, the vehicles will stop and give way to you at any moment.' That is really amazing.</p>
In-class written feedback
From interviewees
<p><b>S2—<u>original</u>:</b> 'It is generally accepted that introduce more extra things, related to the article you are going to learn, to students can have better effects fro them to better understand the article. I have the same feeling. After knowing U.K.'s railway, I have more interest to learn the article. I feel it is a very happy thing for me to study. Also, I can learn more from my classmates, exchange our opinions. Then I can remember others' opinions more clear.'</p> <p><b>S7—<u>Translation</u>:</b> we talked about British railway system last class, and you told us of your personal experience in England, which let me understand the features of British railway. I'm really impressed of that. England is a developed industrial country, so I thought its railway system should be very advanced. I didn't expect that there existed the shortcomings such as the often delay, being easily affected by the weather, no night trains, etc. All these aspects are less satisfactory than in China. However, they have advantages as well, such as the clean coach, the reasonably designed toilet, which all embody their customer-centred sense of</p>



service. Such kind of cultural knowledge really pushed my eagerness to learn about the foreignness, aroused my curiosity and developed my ability of reasoning and analysing, thus helped me learn to understand things more objectively and more comprehensively from different perspectives. As an English major, to know of some cultural difference is fundamental and necessary. It can widen our horizons and richen our knowledge, which is very beneficial. So, I like such kind of classroom activities, and hope we could have more later on.

Etc.

**From regular attendees**

**S17—original:** I like to have a specific topic to talk about, from talking with my classmates; I get many ideas that I have never thought about it. I cannot always form my own opinion toward one thing. So, their words can develop my thinking. I especially like to hear your knowledge about the railway system abroad. That's something I've never heard before. It can draw my attention and broaden my mind. That's wonderful, I enjoy it.

**S14—Translation:** in this activity, we practised our oral English, got to know British railway system, and broadened our horizon. But in terms of study, I don't think this task is more inspiring/instructive that the previous two (which refer to the one with email writing and the other with discussing writing difficulties).

Etc.

**From others**

**S20—original:** The relevant discussion to the text makes class more attractive. I'm very happy that I have chance to know something about Britain in this way. It gave me an impression that it is a relaxation to have such kind of class. Now I haven't any pressure such as memorizing long words, analysing complex sentences or paragraphs etc. in the intensive reading class. But I actually have learned something.

**S41—original:** I was very interested in the discussion, because it was very familiar to us. Though most of us don't like our country's railway, we have to face it. And you told us the situation about railway system in Britain; this made us very admire British. I think the discussion was very attractive and we learned the difference between the two countries from it. Besides, it was value to make the class active. You really understand us. We are not only want to learn some knowledge from our book, but also something different outside of our book.

Etc.

### *Appendix 3: Examples of organised data on interview questions and answers (translation)*

<b>Question 4</b>	<b>How do you think of the stage of doing tasks, say, before, while or after studying a text?</b>
<b>Group 1 (Class 2, 15/12/04)</b>	<p><b>Interviewee 1:</b> when doing a task after we studied the text, some students might think that the class was going to be over.</p> <p><b>Interviewee 4:</b> I think it depends on students' learning objectives. For most students, the intensive reading course is just supposed to offer them some new words, language points, etc. Beyond these, they seem to have nothing to learn. So, they are not likely to care much about the task if it involves literature or cultural things that are not directly related to our studies.</p>
<b>Group 2 (Class 1, 17/12/04)</b>	<p><b>Interviewee 1:</b> as far as I'm concerned, I prefer to do tasks at an earlier stage of a class, because I'm afraid my thoughts would be influenced by the text once we studied the text. Very possibly I couldn't help thinking about the writer's opinions instead of my own.</p> <p><b>Interviewee 2:</b> me too. I think the pre-reading tasks might be more useful in that they could arouse our curiosity. When we finished studying a text, we would naturally think that the class was to be over and a new text was coming soon. Also, someone might not think that the post-reading tasks would be very relevant to the texts.</p> <p><b>Interviewee 3:</b> if we were supposed to do some post-reading tasks, probably we could discuss the author's viewpoints and see if there were differences between his and ours.</p>
<b>Group 3 (Class 2, 20/12/04)</b>	<p><b>Interviewee 1:</b> I think the pre-reading task is better, because it may lead us to the text or its theme/topic, which in turn will get us interested to study the text.</p> <p><b>Interviewee 2:</b> yeah, we are more open-minded at the time.</p> <p><b>Interviewee 3:</b> I think so too. If we are asked to discuss the relevant topic after studying the text, perhaps our thoughts and languages will</p>



	<p>be influenced by the text, as there may not be much space for our imagination and exploration.</p> <p><b>Interviewee 1:</b> sometimes when our tasks take place at the second class-period, or especially when it's approaching lunchtime, we might become less patient because we're hungry and everything in our mind is what to eat for lunch. On the contrary, if the task is at the beginning of a class, most students are likely to have high spirits and it should be easy to create an active class atmosphere.</p>
<p><b>Group 4</b> <b>(Class 1,</b> <b>22/12/04)</b></p>	<p><b>Interviewee 5:</b> for me, doing task is very interesting, no matter at what time. In contrast, explaining texts is more boring, especially those long and complicated sentences. We feel tired and easily go absent-minded. So, I think it's better not to set an obvious line between them. I mean, we'd better combine tasks and texts together rather than turn sharply from a task to a text or vice versa.</p> <p><b>Interviewee 1:</b> I like pre-reading tasks because the topics are fresh to us and we at that time are more open-minded. However, after we study the text, we'll be easily influenced by it and our minds will unconsciously go with the author.</p> <p><b>Interviewee 5:</b> Actually it's not bad to have a task after studying a text, either, because at that stage students might be more aware of the purpose and significance of the task, thanks to their understanding of the text. I think the reason why students seem less interested or patient when doing the post-reading task is that too much time spent on the text has already got them tired. What's more, if the class happened to be the last one before lunchtime, then students couldn't wait to be dismissed.</p>

<p><b>Question</b> <b>5</b></p>	<p><b>What do you think about these two kinds of tasks, text-related ones (comprehension/understanding tasks) and topic-related ones (opinion tasks)?</b></p>
<p><b>Group 1</b> <b>(Class 2,</b></p>	<p><b>Interviewee 1:</b> I'm more interested in the topic-related tasks.</p> <p><b>Interviewee 2:</b> I think these two kinds should complement each other. We shouldn't say we prefer which one. I think they both are useful.</p>



15/12/04)	<p><b>Interviewee 4:</b> the activity like finding out topic sentences may help us understand the text. Every part must have certain thesis statement, which is not easy for most of us to locate. So, it's better to analyse it.</p>
<p><b>Group 2</b> (Class 1, 17/12/04)</p>	<p><b>Interviewee 1:</b> I think the first kind should be attached more importance, while the second kind could play a complementary role. Take the house-drawing task as an example, I felt so easy to understand that part of text after we finished drawing.</p> <p><b>Interviewee 2:</b> I think both kinds are good. The tasks closely related to text contents could help us with our reading comprehension. The topic-related tasks could give us a macro-picture and promote our thinking. I think by doing some pre-reading tasks, our curiosity could be aroused and we are more likely to be motivated to read the text.</p> <p><b>Interviewee 3:</b> yes, just like those two tasks—the one with aims of education and the one with freedom. Before studying the texts, we could use our imagination to think about what aims we had and how we understood freedom. That's good.</p> <p><b>Interviewee 2:</b> Sometimes we final-year students might be too busy to preview the text before class, so, if we could be given a relevant topic to think about at the beginning of a class, I'm sure it would help us get some background information about what we were going to learn.</p>
<p><b>Group 3</b> (Class 2, 20/12/04)</p>	<p><b>Interviewee 3:</b> I like those tasks which are close to our life, because I feel the purpose of our attending class is not only to learn some language points or sentence structures, but more importantly, to learn more ideas and get ourselves cultivated and cultured.</p> <p><b>Interviewee 1:</b> right, if we focus too much on the language itself, it will be too boring and not worthwhile at all.</p>
<p><b>Group 4</b> (Class 1, 22/12/04)</p>	<p><b>Interviewee 3:</b> I prefer those tasks which involve a wide range of topics, because they are more likely to be interesting and profound. In addition, if the task has little to do with the text, perhaps we won't feel too much pressure because most of us have no time to preview the text before class.</p> <p><b>Interviewee 4:</b> I agree, but those tasks closely related to texts may have more direct help to our studies. For example, they can help us learn to</p>

	<p>analyse and understand the text. They'll also be useful for our exams in the short term. In the long run, however, those things are easily forgotten. In this sense, it is still the profound tasks with rich contents that may leave us deeper impression.</p> <p><b>Interviewee 1:</b> yes various topics could arouse our interest, but when studying the text, I also hope to have some particular tasks which could help us understand it, especially when we come to class with questions. So, I think both kinds are useful.</p> <p><b>Interviewee 5:</b> I'm also thinking about another problem which might be related to the overall educational system in our country. You know, we like the tasks you designed for us as well as your teaching method. But to be frank, I wonder if they are truly realistic/useful in this context. Even if we understand all these texts thoroughly under the help of your tasks and your explanation, what's the point? I mean, how much sense can these texts make for our future? What on earth qualities and abilities do these texts intend to help us improve?</p>
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<b>Question 6</b>	<p>I wonder if you sometimes felt your motivation and interest was affected by your nearby environment such as the whole class, the teacher, your peers, your task group, other group members, etc. (How did the participatory structure influence your motivations for doing tasks?)</p>
<b>Group 1 (Class 2, 15/12/04)</b>	<p><b>Interviewee 1:</b> I feel myself more active than before, possibly because there are fewer students in class and therefore there are more chances for me to speak. I'm not willing to speak when there are a lot of people. Another thing, you know, there are certain students who can almost answer every question very well and very frequently, which is a kind of invisible pressure on others.</p> <p><b>Interviewee 2:</b> me too. Having fewer people in class is not a bad thing because all these attendees come to class for the purpose of learning. We have a lot in common and therefore could understand each other. This helps create a relaxing atmosphere.</p> <p><b>Interviewee 4:</b> if everybody came, probably I would quit. Because in a big class, everyone just looks down at their books and there will be very</p>



	few people who want to speak. A small team is 'purer', in a sense.
<b>Group 2</b> <b>(Class 1,</b> <b>17/12/04)</b>	<p><b>Interviewee 2:</b> I think if there were too many students, there would be few chances that the teacher could consider me. On the contrary, if there were only a small number of students, the teacher knew you were there and you were unlikely to be ignored. You would be easily pushed to engage yourself in the class and follow through, which might be a way of getting motivated. And I don't think the effect of learning will be as good as what a small class can produce/achieve. Among so many students, there must be a certain amount of students who do not take the class seriously at all. Of course every class has several active students, and unavoidably they are very likely to be the only students who have chances to speak in class. If there was such a top student in a discussion group, other members would naturally think that s/he should be the representative of the group to give a speech. Then there seemed to be no point for others to think hard. Under such circumstance, even if I wanted to say something, I wouldn't have enough confidence to be a volunteer, thinking that others were more capable than me.</p> <p><b>Interviewee 3:</b> I guess I would feel too much pressure if I were chosen to be a representative. You know, you are responsible for the entire group. If you performed well, that would be fantastic. If you didn't, you would have ruined the group's reputation. In view of this, all group members prefer to select the best one on their behalf. For me, if I don't think I'm the best, I will give up this chance to others. So, you see, this is like a vicious circle—the high achievers get better and the low achievers get worse.</p>
<b>Group 3</b> <b>(Class 2,</b> <b>20/12/04)</b>	<p><b>Interviewee 2:</b> for me, my study is my own thing; my coming to class has nothing to do with others. No matter whether everybody is present in class or not, I still listen to the lecture in the same way, no much difference really. An exception is when you study with others after class, say, with other five roommates in your dorm, if all of them are working hard and only you are wasting time, probably you would join them and compete with them.</p> <p><b>Interviewee 3:</b> I think it depends. For example, some introverted students</p>



	<p>might not be willing to speak in a big class with lot of people. However, if there are fewer students, they might have less pressure. This must have something to do with individuals' characters.</p> <p><b>Interviewee 1:</b> this is not a problem for me. Possibly the only influence of small number of attendees on me is that I might sometimes connive at my being absent-minded for a while, thinking that there are a lot of other students who even didn't come to the class at all.</p> <p><b>Interviewee 2:</b> although we haven't had lots of students in class this term, I feel that those who do come are getting more and more active in terms of their class participation. And we are showing more and more understanding to each other, which is good, because we may get less scared of class.</p> <p><b>Interviewee 1:</b> the fewer students, the more chances to speak. The more we speak, the better our oral English becomes.</p>
<p><b>Group 4</b> (Class 1, 22/12/04)</p>	<p><b>Interviewee 3:</b> for me, I'm not influenced by others. Just like coming to class, so long as I like to come, I come; I don't care what others do at all.</p> <p><b>Interviewee 2:</b> for me, the fewer students there are, the more I'm willing to attend.</p> <p><b>Interviewee 4:</b> we could be more concentrative in a small class. I have an impression that both teachers and students tend to be more focused on the class when there are fewer people.</p> <p><b>Interviewee 2:</b> I feel this kind of atmosphere is like in a family, every student could get the teacher's attention. I feel I'm 'white-headed' and therefore very willing to study hard. On the contrary, in a big and loose class, it's not likely that the teacher could care you or even see you.</p> <p><b>Interviewee 4:</b> some of us may feel scared of speaking in front of too many people in class.</p> <p><b>Interviewee 2:</b> or they may not be 'scared', just uninterested or indifferent.</p> <p><b>Interviewee 1:</b> what's more, in a big class, I always think that there may not be my turn to speak, which does ruin my participating enthusiasm.</p> <p><b>Interviewee 5:</b> I think if there were a half of students coming to class, that would be great. You know, the classroom is so big and the students are too few. Sometimes I feel isolated if others are sitting in that corner of</p>

	<p>the classroom while I myself sitting in this corner. What's more, I don't like the way of arranging seats in our class, row by row. I can't see my classmates' faces, which is not good. I want all of us to sit together, facing each other, which will make me feel more involved when having a discussion.</p>
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## Appendix 4: Examples of students' original letters

## A Letter to Anna

Dear Anna.

I am very happy to write to you, however, the topic you gave us is so serious than I don't know how to write it well. As your student, I like you very much, just like three years ago what you told me in your letter. Therefore, I often go to the class and listen your lecture and I should be the student who enter the class more than ten times.

Why I enter the class, I think, there are two reasons. Firstly, because of yourself, I like you and I think we should be friends. When I was a freshman, in your listening class, I was very happy and relaxed, most importantly, I obtained a lot of knowledge from you. In addition, the letter you gave me and the picture you gave me encouraged me very much in the past three years. Secondly, I could not take part in the entrance examination to graduate school, I am not busy now. In my mind, I don't expect much from your class, I just want to try my best to be a good student and communicate with you sometimes, by the way, learning from something about the text book. That's why I always come into class if I am



in the college.

Anna, you are a good teacher and your students are also good. They all have their objective and ~~they~~ try ~~on~~ their best to make it come true. You have a good nature, you never complain about them and I know you understand their situation and would like to do your best to help them. Perhaps they did not pay attention to your feelings and your situation, but I know they still like you like three years ago.

Considering me, I hope we can be friends forever, although you will be a doctor and I am just an undergraduate. I like making friends with all the person who I met and I ~~treat~~ always treat them honestly. The time we are together is not long, consequently, I cherish it very much. I don't know when we can meet each other after we leave college, which is unexpected. Maybe we can email each other. I must write to you frequently if I am not busy. Last time, I have told you my situation, I had take a full-time job, however, recently, I was not happy, I found that there were a lot of trouble in my work and I hurt some persons unconsciously. In a word, all the thing troubled me very much, now I try adjusting myself. Maybe I was wrong in the past.

Well, I must stop. I hope you could be happy everyday.



Dear Miss Li:

Firstly, I want to say sorry to you, because I don't belong to the students who come to intensive reading class frequently.

To be frank, in the last three years I hardly missed any classes, that does not mean every teacher is very excellent, just because I know even if the teacher's teaching method is not good, he or she knows much more than I. Besides, in that case, I am able to learn something more or less from him or her. This

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This year, on the contrary, I hardly come to any classes, except writing course (for the teacher usually arranges assignment in class) and second foreign language class (for it is one of the major subjects I will take for my post-graduate examination).

Just like what you said, before the national day, we seldom had intensive reading class, which disappointed me to some extent. On the other hand, I have made a plan for my studying, and through nearly one month's studying by myself, I felt it is more efficient for me to self-study than have classes. When I learn by myself, it is more easily for me to concentrate my all myself on studying. Besides, I have to spend more time studying politics and second foreign language subjects, for I haven't learnt them very well last three years, I am very weak in them.

Furthermore, in my opinion I can learn the intensive reading out of class by myself, and learn it in my spare time as a reading material, in that way, I am able to improve my reading level. Besides, I don't think the words in the intensive reading book is practical, I am inclined to remember the words relating to the examinations.

In fact, I really like intensive reading class, however, it can not meet two ends, if possible, I will come to intensive reading class more frequently than before, I believe it will be helpful for my studying.

Finally, my dear teacher, I'd like to request you give us more information about English studying for post-graduate exam. Because most of us will take part in the post-graduate exam in the coming January in 2005.

Best wishes.

Yours sincerely,



My dear teacher,

I have to say sorry to you first, for so far, I have attended the class for only 5 or 6 times.

I really like your class and you very much. ~~the~~ I was never absent when I was the first-year student, when you taught our listening. You are so kind and friendly to us, no other teachers can do so well. Really, you are not only a teacher for us, but importantly, a friend, a good friend, a kind elder sister for us. I think if a teacher can be thought as a member of this big "family", she or he must have done a perfect job. You belong to this kind of teachers, you are successful.

Please, please don't feel guilty for our absence, and think there is something wrong with you or your teaching. We really want to attend your class, every class, but you ~~know~~ know as a student of this college, we have to have a plan of our future because of the poor reputation, and we are the fourth-year students, ~~we~~ most of us want to pursue further education, so...

I want to choose ~~the~~ finance as my major for the further education. so I have to learn the courses by myself, and some times attend the relative classes in other department. so I have no choice.

I am sure that you can understand us, you are the "understanding God" for us. ok, at last, I want you to know this point: we are your best students and you are our best friends. never feel guilty for yourself and never feel sorry for us. let's look forward to the future, and make our dreams become realization.



## Why I not come here

My dear teacher, firstly thank you very much. The topic you give me is not only a way of exam but also a way we can communicate with each other. We students have so many words to say to a teacher, but we have no chances ~~now~~ I get one.

Firstly, let me talk about you. To be frank, you are a very good teacher compared with <sup>some</sup> other teachers. Some teachers they don't have the ability to teach here at all. I clearly remember a teacher who always speaks Chinese in his class, will <sup>surely</sup> make mistakes when he speaks English. Also there is a teacher, you know her, has told us, "I will never teach here again, the students here... the teacher here..." But this semester she appeared again, I don't know why.

Secondly, let me talk about myself. I really think it is important for me to learn ~~English~~ Intensive Reading. I don't like play truant. But now I really have no time to come here because of the coming ~~exam~~ <sup>entrance</sup> examination for the post-graduation graduate. Believe it or not. I am so busy that I even have no time to study any courses we now have. I totally agree <sup>with</sup> what your husband has told us: "just get something useful to do, and don't waste time, that's OK!" Here, I'd like to say something about our Japanese teacher. He is a very very strange teacher. He doesn't like us to



play truant for any reason. And his exam is very difficult to pass. To be frank, I hate him. What he does now is not helping us but doing ~~us~~ something very bad for us. We know what we need to learn, what we need to do, we do care about our own futures. It is ~~to~~ bad for one teacher to force his students to do something sometimes. He is wasting our time! So thank you. Thank you very much for giving me the time to do my own things. It is very great, and you are very great.

What I ~~have~~ write here is my true words. I don't know whether I get some wrong ideas. But I ~~do~~ believe there are many many students agree with what I said.



Dear Anna:

This letter is from the bottom of a complicated heart. I will take this opportunity to tell you how I feel about you and the experience we shared in the past two separate periods.

I don't want to flatter you, but in my eyes, you are my most favorite teacher in this college. I <sup>still</sup> remember that you told us to face hardships with smiles. I still remember that your view on the relation among lover, husband/wife, and soulmate. I still remember the English song "Yesterday once more" we sang together in your class. All these are so unforgettable that once I see the smiling face, listen to this song, or <sup>even</sup> deal with relation with my girlfriend, I think of you. Never before have any other teachers in my life had such great influence on me. To me, you are not only a teacher from whom I can learn things but also a friend on whom I can rely. In your class, there is no gap between us. I feel at ease as if I were listening to stories told by a gentle and kind elder sister. That's why I <sup>and</sup> chose to take seats in the first row, just in front of you.

Anna, oh my dear Anna, You know what? We were overjoyed when we heard that you'll return and becoming our teacher again, "just like a long lost friend". Everyone speaks of you and are wondering what is Anna like after two years!



separation. Is she beyond recognition or does she remain the same? With this question we attended your class. As far as I am concerned, I think you have changed a little in appearance, seem more mature and experienced. But, I was convinced that deep inside your heart, you are the very Anna I am familiar with, just by your smiling face and your distinctive slogan — "I love you!" "Cute Anna is back", someone ~~said~~ said that. I can't agree more. So I decided to attend your class till ~~you~~ <sup>the day</sup> you go back to Britain. That's my promise.

Now, I have to confess that I <sup>have</sup> broken my words. I don't mean to make excuses, but I must say ideal and reality speak different languages. I made up my mind to become a postgraduate and I must pay the price and suffer the consequences. I dropped out of numerous classes in the last semester and this semester. I <sup>even</sup> gave up studying German ~~and~~, which I think is a big pity. However, if there is one thing I may regret in the future, that is my absence of your class. I have to say sorry, sorry, sorry. I don't know whether my choices are reasonable or correct. but I believe that once I am determined, I should never budge. Like a soldier in Chinese class, once I go across the river, I can not retreat.

Anna, will you forgive me for my absence, I think you will for you are my big sister. Someday in the future, if I successfully pass the ~~exam~~ <sup>postgraduate</sup> exam, I will tell you to share my joy and happiness.

Anna, please bear in mind. If ~~the~~ <sup>you</sup> you ~~will~~ <sup>just</sup> just love us!

Best wishes!

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Dear Anna:

First, sorry for my not attending your class I don't mean that's your fault, it is completely for my own reason.

I am not a qualified English major from the beginning to the end. When I was a freshman at Shanghai, I realized my English was too poor compared to ~~the~~ other classmates, especially the girl students. I found it is difficult for me to understand the text book, I didn't know how to learn English. Three years have passed, there is little improvement in my English. I know I don't fit to study English. I don't like it. I have no advantage in English. So I determine to attend graduate school and choose another major. After all, English is only a kind of tool, I have to learn some other skills and gain some different experiences.

Since the start of this semester, I focus all my energy and time on preparing for the post graduate exam. I must succeed this time, or it will leave me a great shame in college. When others ask me what ~~is~~ my major, I ~~am~~ <sup>am</sup> always not willing to say I'm an English major. Because when you say you're an English major, others will think you must have a high level in English. But I have little advantages over non-majors. When I do exercises on the exam paper, I still can not fully understand the reading comprehension as the non-majors do.

The first time I ~~add~~ attended your first four classes the first night I saw the text, it made me afraid. It's too long and too many new words and so complicated sentence structures, I have no time to conquer it.

Choosing English as my major is failure to me. I don't want another failure, so I chose post graduate in another major.

Yours Sincerely



## Appendix 5: Examples of the texts from the textbook

### Unit Six

#### TEXT I

### HOW TO GET THINGS DONE

Robert Benchley

#### PRE-CLASS WORK

##### I. Pre-reading Questions

1. Do you as a rule make plans for your everyday work? Do you usually carry out your plans? Do you consider yourself a good planner or otherwise? Give reasons for your being or not being one.
2. "The Fine Art of Putting Things Off," a text in *A New English Course*, Level 6, is an essay on procrastination, and most probably you enjoyed reading it. Here is another essay on procrastination. What do you think this essay is about?

##### II. Lexical Work

Guess the meanings of the following from word-formation rules or context clues. If you fail to do so, look them up in a dictionary.

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| 1. dissipated (l. 2)                        | 2. rotogravure (l. 7)                                    |
| 3. expenditure (l. 25) <i>exertion</i>      | 4. glutinous (l. 42) <i>stiff sticky</i>                 |
| 5. fidget (l. 45) <i>move</i>               | 6. onerous (l. 66) <i>difficult, tiresome</i>            |
| 7. grind (l. 69) <i>monotonous, tedious</i> | 8. epistolary (l. 77) <i>letter writing</i>              |
| 9. get into the swing of (ll. 78-79)        | 10. salve (l. 87)  |
| 11. dynamo (l. 91)                          | 12. avowed (l. 97) <i>self-declared</i>                  |
| 13. bracket (l. 108)                        | 14. to one's chagrin (ll. 113-114) <i>disappointment</i> |

##### III. Library Work

Look up the following proper names in an encyclopedia.

1. Louis XIV (l. 8)
2. Antwerp (l. 80)



## 3. Hogarth (l. 124)

## TEXT

<sup>Q109 Q9</sup> <sup>In western countries, about writing</sup>  
<sup>fresh & unusual, new,</sup>  
<sup>productive of new things or new ideas, inventive.</sup>  
<sup>am able to</sup>  
<sup>person who wastes his life in search of foolish or dangerous pleasure.</sup>  
<sup>u. 荒废, 散漫</sup>  
<sup>ta</sup>  
<sup>subjunctive mood</sup>  
<sup>this answer can answer any question.</sup>  
 1 A great many people have come up to me and asked me how I manage to get so much work done and still keep looking so dissipated. My answer is "Don't you wish you knew?" and a pretty good answer it is, too, when you consider that nine times out of ten I didn't hear the original question. I needn't have heard the question, for this answer can answer any question.

5 <sup>to continue in the same state or condition</sup>  
 2 But the fact remains that hundreds of thousands of people throughout the country are wondering how I have time to do all my painting, engineering, writing and <sup>kind & helpful to the poor by giving money or gifts.</sup> philanthropic work when, according to the rotogravure sections and society notes, I spend all my time riding to hounds, going to fancy-dress balls disguised as Louis XIV or spelling out GREETINGS TO CALIFORNIA in formation with three thousand Los Angeles school children<sup>3</sup>. <sup>I know how to work hard & how to enjoy myself at the same time.</sup> "All work and all play," they say.

<sup>Q109 Q9</sup>  
 3 The secret of my incredible energy and efficiency in getting work done is a simple one. I have based it very deliberately on a well-known psychological principle and have refined it so that it is now almost too refined. I shall have to begin coarsening it up again pretty soon. <sup>a statement about a person's qualifications, characters & dependability</sup>  
 15 <sup>a note in a publication referring the reader to another passage for source</sup>  
 4 The psychological principle is this: anyone can do any amount of work, provided <sup>if</sup> it isn't the work he is supposed to be doing at that moment. <sup>a man who intends to avoid the thing he has to do would be more willing to engage himself in a thousand other things he does not have to do.</sup>

<sup>body</sup>  
 5 Let us see how this works out in practice. Let us say that I have five things which have to be done before the end of the week: (1) a basketful of letters to be answered, some of them dating from October, 1928, <sup>now is 1930 when this text is written</sup> (2) some bookshelves to be put up and arranged with books (3) a hair-cut to get (4) a pile of scientific magazines to go through and clip (I am collecting <sup>cut</sup> all references to tropical fish that I can find, with the idea of some day buying myself one) and (5) an article to write for this paper<sup>5</sup>.

<sup>Q109 Q9</sup>  
 6 Now With these five tasks staring me in the face<sup>6</sup> on Monday morning, it is little wonder that I go right back to bed as soon as I have had breakfast, in order to store up health and strength for the almost superhuman expenditure of energy that is to come. <sup>build up physical fitness & energy</sup> <sup>immediately</sup> <sup>incredible exertion, using up, consumption</sup>

<sup>Short sentence taken as guiding principle.</sup>  
 7 *Mens sana in corpore sano* is my motto, and, not even to be funny, am I going to make believe that I don't know what the Latin means. <sup>pretend</sup> I feel that the least that I can do is to treat my body right when it has to supply fuel for an insatiable mind like mine. <sup>well &</sup> <sup>in itself</sup> <sup>that can not be satisfied</sup>  
 25 As I lie in bed on Monday morning storing up strength, I make out a schedule.



30 "What do I have to do first?" I ask myself. Well, those letters really should be answered and the pile of scientific magazines should be clipped. [And here is where my secret process comes in.] Instead of putting them first on the list of things which have to ~~be~~ done, I put them last. I <sup>decide</sup> practice a little deception on myself and say, "First you must write that article for the newspaper." I <sup>I'm really determined to</sup> even say this out loud (being careful that nobody hears me, otherwise they would <sup>they'll think I'm all</sup> keep me in bed) and try to fool myself into really believing that I must do the article that day and that the other things can wait. I sometimes <sup>write these down</sup> go so far in this self-deception <sup>deceive myself in such a degree</sup> as to make out a list in pencil, with "No. 1. Newspaper article" underlined in red. (The underlining in red is rather difficult, as there is never a red pencil on the table beside the bed, unless I have taken one to bed with me on Sunday night.)

40 <sup>British lunch</sup> <sup>neatly planned</sup> <sup>jump</sup> Then, when everything is lined up, I bound out of bed and have lunch. I find that a good, <sup>delicious, substantial</sup> heavy lunch, with some sort of <sup>sticky</sup> glutinous dessert, is good preparation for the day's work as it keeps one from getting nervous and <sup>easily excited</sup> excitable. We workers must keep cool and calm, otherwise we would just <sup>waste</sup> throw away our time in <sup>rush about</sup> jumping about and <sup>move restlessly or nervously</sup> <sup>can't sit still</sup> fidgeting. <sup>accomplish nothing</sup>

45 <sup>Senseless</sup> <sup>silly</sup> I then seat myself at my desk with my typewriter before me, and sharpen five pencils. (The sharp pencils are for <sup>push a pointed thing into sth</sup> poking holes in the <sup>desk-blott</sup> desk-blotter, and a pencil has to be pretty sharp to do that. I find that I can't get more than six holes out of one pencil.) Following this I say to myself (again out loud, if it is <sup>necessary</sup> practical). "Now, old man! Get at this article!"

50 <sup>systematic plan of action, a plot</sup> <sup>cleverly, skillfully</sup> <sup>stop working</sup> <sup>(make it on purpose)</sup> <sup>magazine</sup> <sup>to provide with explanatory or decorative features</sup> Gradually the scheme begins to work. My eye catches the pile of magazines, which I have artfully placed on a nearby table beforehand. I write my name and address at the top of the sheet of paper in the typewriter and then sink back. The magazines being within reach (also part of the plot) I look to see if anyone is watching me and get <sup>one</sup> off the top of the pile. Hello, what's this! In the very first one is an article by Dr. William Beebe, <sup>illustrated</sup> by horrifying photographs! Pushing my chair away from my desk, I am soon hard at work clipping.

60 <sup>(in a moment)</sup> <sup>(future perfect tense)</sup> One of the interesting things about the *Argyropelius*, or "Silver Hatchet" fish, I find, is that it has eyes in its wrists. I would have been sufficiently surprised just to find out that a fish had wrists, but to learn that it has eyes in them is a discovery so astounding that I am hardly able to cut out the picture. What a lot one learns simply by <sup>look through</sup> <sup>with pictures</sup> thumbing through the illustrated weeklies! It is hard work, though, and many a



weaker spirit would give it up half-done, but when there is something else of "more importance" to be finished (you see, I still <sup>continue with</sup> keep up the deception, letting myself go on thinking that the newspaper article is of more importance) no work is too hard or too <sup>difficult, troublesome</sup> onerous to keep one busy.

Thus, before the afternoon is half over, I have gone through the scientific magazine and have a <sup>orderly, clean, tidy</sup> neat pile of clippings (including one of a Viper Fish<sup>10</sup> which I wish you could see. You would die laughing). Then it is back to the <sup>thing & dull work</sup> grind of the newspaper article.

<sup>large in amount, extent, or</sup> This time I get as far as the title, which I write down with considerable degree. satisfaction until I find that I have misspelled one word terribly, so that the whole sheet of paper has to come out and a fresh one be <sup>put in</sup> inserted. As I am doing this, my eye catches the basket of letters.

Now, <sup>Usually he hates to write letters, but now he likes to do</sup> if there is one thing that I hate to do (and there is, you may be sure) it is to write letters. But somehow, with the magazine article before me waiting to be done, I am <sup>controlled</sup> seized with an <sup>in letter writing</sup> epistolary fervor that amounts to a craving, and I <sup>is equal to strong desire</sup> slyly <sup>at dishonest</sup> sneak the first of the unanswered letters out of the basket. <sup>think</sup> I figure out in my mind that I will get <sup>to take secretly</sup> more into the swing of writing the article if I practice a little on a few letters. This

first one, anyway, I really must answer. True, it is from a friend in Antwerp asking me to look him up when I am in Europe in the summer of 1929, (so he can't actually be watching the incoming boats for an answer, but I owe something to politeness after all.)

So instead of putting a fresh sheet of copy-paper<sup>11</sup> into the typewriter, I <sup>put in</sup> slip in one of my handsome bits of personal stationery and dash off a note to my friend in Antwerp.

Then, being well in the letter-writing mood, I clean up <sup>all the letters</sup> the entire batch. I feel a little guilty about the article, but the pile of freshly stamped envelopes and the neat <sup>a group of objects held together</sup> bundle of clippings on tropical fish do much to <sup>relieve, make less guilty</sup> salve my conscience. Tomorrow I will do the article, and no fooling this time, either.

When tomorrow comes I am up with one of the older and more <sup>slow-moving, not very quick</sup> sluggish larks<sup>12</sup> or active.

A fresh sheet of copy-paper in the machine, and my name and address neatly printed at the top, and all before eleven A.M.! <sup>energetic person</sup> "A human dynamo" is the name I think up for myself. I have decided to write something about snake-charming<sup>13</sup> and am already <sup>He thinks he has done a lot of work</sup> more than <sup>very satisfied</sup> satisfied with the title "These Snake-Charming People." But, in order to write about snake-charming, one has to know a little about its history, and where should one go to find history but to a book? Maybe in that pile of books in the corner



is one on snake-charming! Nobody could point the finger of scorn at me if I went over to those books for the avowed purpose of [research work] for the matter at hand. No writer could be supposed to carry all that information in his head.

100 16 So, with a perfectly clear conscience, I leave my desk for a few minutes and begin glancing over the titles of the books. Of course, it is difficult to find any book, much less one on snake-charming, in a pile which has been standing in the corner for weeks. What really is needed is for them to be on a shelf where their titles will be visible at a glance. And there is the shelf, standing beside the pile of books! It seems almost like a divine command written in the sky: "If you want to finish that article, first put up the shelf and arrange the books on it!" Nothing could be clearer or more logical.

110 17 In order to put up the shelf, the laws of physics have decreed that there must be nails, a hammer and some sort of brackets to hold it up on the wall. You can't just wet a shelf with your tongue and stick it up. And, as there are no nails or brackets in the house (or, if there are, they are probably hidden somewhere) the next thing to do is put on my hat and go out to buy them. Although it disturbs me to put off the actual start of the article, I feel that I am doing only what is in the line of duty to put on my hat and go out to buy nails and brackets. And, as I put on my hat, I realize to my chagrin that I need a hair-cut badly. I can kill two birds with one stone or at least with two, and stop in at the barber's on the way back. (I will feel all the more like writing after a turn in the fresh air.) Any doctor would tell me that.

120 18 So in a few hours I return, completely clean & tidy, spick and span and smelling of lilac, bearing nails, brackets, the evening papers and some crackers and peanut butter. Then it's ho! for a quick snack and a glance through the evening papers (there might be something in them which would alter what I was going to write about snake-charming) and in no time at all the shelf is up, slightly crooked but up, and the books are arranged in a neat row in alphabetical order and all ready for almost instantaneous-reference. There does not

Q ← happen to be one on snake-charming among them, but there is a very interesting one containing some Hogarth prints and one which will bear even closer inspection dealing with the growth of the Motion Picture, illustrated with "stills" from famous film productions. A really remarkable industry, the motion pictures. I might want to write an article on it sometime. Not today, probably, for it is six o'clock and there is still the one on snake-charming to finish up first. Tomorrow morning sharp! Yes,



↑ sir! <sup>end of the body</sup>  
 130 ✓ 19 And so, you see, in two days I have done four of the things I had to do, simply by making believe that it was the fifth that I <sup>from the order, outside</sup> must do. And the next day, I <sup>finish, do</sup> fix up something else, like taking down the bookshelf and putting it somewhere else, that I <sup>from inside</sup> have to do, and then I get the fifth one done. <sup>if things continue to be completed at such a speed.</sup>  
 20 The only trouble is that <sup>this is true</sup> at this rate I will soon run out of things to do, and will be forced to get at that newspaper article the first thing Monday morning. <sup>if this state of affairs continue. I have nothing to do</sup>

author's tone: happy, content, triumphant

From: J.W. Presley and N. Prinsky, pp.261-265.

## NOTES

The Author — Robert Charles Benchley (1889-1945), U.S. humorist, was drama critic of *Life* (1920-29) and *New Yorker* (1929-40), and star of fifty short films. He was one of the foremost writers of humorous nonfiction, theater reviews and book reviews from the 1920s to the mid-1940s. Among his books are: *No Poems: Or Around the World Backwards and Sideways* (1932), *From Bed to Worse: Or Comforting Thoughts About the Bison* (1934), *Benchley Roundup* (1954), and *Benchley Lost and Found* (1970). The present text was written for the *New York Tribune* in 1930.

1. the rotogravure sections and society notes — sections of newspapers devoted to rotogravure pictures 用轮转凹版印刷的报刊插图栏 and to news about the socially distinguished people
2. riding to hounds — going fox-hunting on horseback
3. spelling out GREETINGS TO CALIFORNIA in formation with three thousand school children — Benchley joined three thousand school children who marched in a procession showing the words GREETINGS TO CALIFORNIA.
4. "All work and all play" — This is a play on the saying "All work and no play makes Jack a dull boy."
5. this paper — apparently referring to the *New York Tribune*
6. With these five tasks staring me in the face — With these five tasks to be done immediately or urgently. "Stare someone in the face" means "be too obvious to miss".
7. *Mens sana in corpore sano* — (Latin) A sound mind in a sound body



① Distinction bet. culture and training

② Inert ideas, ideas passively received without being utilized, <sup>Appendix 5</sup> are not only useless but even harmful to education

Second part 4-9

① Two educational commandments

② Idea should be combined & put into application

## Unit Seven

③ The understanding provided by the literary side of education: the joining of ideas (Lawrence Summers)

### TEXT I

④

Dialogue

## THE AIMS OF EDUCATION

Alfred North Whitehead

Harvard Uni

- find out the problem
- analyse
- solve

Beijing Uni

- how to be a person
- study
- how to contribute to the society

## PRE-CLASS WORK

### I. Pre-reading Questions

1. Have you ever thought about the aims of education? What are they? To learn general knowledge? To learn a skill? To pass examinations? To get prepared for a good job? And what else? List as many objectives of education as you can think of.
2. In the Preface to his collection of essays on education, Whitehead stated explicitly, "the whole book is a protest against dead knowledge." What do you think is the view of Whitehead concerning the aims of education in this essay?

### II. Lexical Work

Guess the meanings of the following from word-formation rules or context clues.

If you fail to do so, look them up in a dictionary.

- |                             |                                    |
|-----------------------------|------------------------------------|
| 1. bore (l. 3)              | 2. inert (l. 14)                   |
| 3. ferment (l. 17)          | 4. pedantry (l. 18)                |
| 5. dryrot (l. 29)           | 6. enunciate (l. 29) express       |
| 7. insistent (l. 49) urgent | 8. communion (l. 56)               |
| 9. proposition (l. 69)      | 10. reiteration (l. 86) repetition |
| 11. concurrently (l. 87)    | 12. plethora (l. 90)               |

### III. Library Work

Look up some information on the following personages in an encyclopedia.

- |                        |                    |
|------------------------|--------------------|
| 1. Shakespeare (l. 55) | 2. Molière (l. 55) |
| 3. Sophocles (l. 55)   | 4. Virgil (l. 56)  |



Training  
Culture  
TEXT

refers to the acquisition of skills & info, which is part of education.  
refers to the cultivation of the ability to think, to make discoveries, which is the ultimate aim of edu. (to judge, & to create)

<sup>general knowledge</sup> Culture<sup>1</sup> is activity of thought, and <sup>make you think, have your own ideas</sup> receptiveness to beauty and humane feeling. <sup>you'll become very kind.</sup>

Scrap of information have nothing to do with it. A merely well-informed man is the most useless <sup>dull, uninteresting person</sup> (bore) on God's earth. <sup>kind, understanding</sup>

What we should aim at producing is men who possess both culture and expert knowledge in some special direction. Their expert

knowledge will give them <sup>good beginning, foundation</sup> the ground to start from, and their culture will lead them as

deep as philosophy and as high as art. We have to remember that the valuable

intellectual development is self-development, and that it mostly takes place between the

ages of sixteen and thirty. <sup>educate</sup> As to training, the most important part is given by mothers

before the age of twelve. A saying <sup>because of</sup> due to Archbishop Temple <sup>What he said supports</sup> illustrates my meaning.

Surprise was expressed at the success in <sup>later part of one's life</sup> after-life of a man, who (as a boy at Rugby)

had been somewhat undistinguished. He answered, "It is not what they are at

eighteen, it is what they become afterwards that matters."

<sup>Inert Ideas</sup> <sup>be careful not to teach</sup> In training a child to activity of thought, above all things we must <sup>be careful not to teach</sup> beware of what

I will call <sup>inactive, static</sup> "inert ideas" — that is to say, ideas that are merely received into the mind

without being utilised, or tested, or thrown into <sup>put some knowledge into new knowledge</sup> fresh combinations.

<sup>one period of historical time</sup> In the history of education, the most striking phenomenon is that schools of

learning, which at one epoch are alive with a ferment of genius, in a succeeding

generation exhibit merely pedantry and routine. <sup>active development of creativeness, imagination follows</sup> The reason is, that they are overladen

with inert ideas. <sup>show</sup> Education with inert ideas is not only useless: it is, above all things,

<sup>topic sentence</sup> harmful — <sup>sometimes in the history</sup> Corruptio optimi, pessima<sup>4</sup>. Except at rare intervals of intellectual ferment,

education in the past has been radically <sup>make impure by spreading into sth</sup> infected with inert ideas. That is the reason

why uneducated <sup>completely</sup> clever women, who have seen much of the world, are in middle life so <sup>in the middle time of their life</sup> (45-65)

<sup>a large part of</sup> much the most cultured part of the community. They have been saved from this

horrible burden of inert ideas. Every intellectual revolution which has ever <sup>develop people's wisdom</sup> stirred

humanity into greatness has been a passionate protest against inert ideas. Then, alas, <sup>excited</sup>

with pathetic ignorance of human psychology, <sup>causing a feeling of pity or sorrow</sup> it has proceeded by some educational

scheme to <sup>causing compassion</sup> bind humanity <sup>the deplorable</sup> afresh with inert ideas of its own fashioning. <sup>once more</sup> A — B —

<sup>keep mankind in bondage</sup> Let us now ask how in our system of education we are to <sup>again with inactive thoughts in its own unique way</sup> guard against this

mental dryrot. <sup>(inert ideas) disease of mind caused by first</sup> We enunciate two educational commandments, <sup>prevent this intellectual decay</sup> "Do not teach too

many subjects," and again, "What you teach, teach thoroughly."



The importance of understanding

Appendix 5 energy

physical or intellectual <sup>vigour</sup> - the capacity to live, grow, or develop

35 The result of teaching small parts of a large number of subjects is the passive reception of disconnected ideas, not <sup>give light to</sup> illumined with any <sup>burst out</sup> spark of vitality. Let the main ideas which are introduced into a child's education be few and important, and let them be thrown into every combination possible. The child should make <sup>few but important ideas</sup> them his own, and should understand their application <sup>know how to use them in dif. situations</sup> here and now in the circumstances of his actual life.

From the very beginning of his education, the child should experience the joy of discovery. The discovery which he has to make, is that general ideas give an understanding of that stream of events which pours through his life, which is his life. <sup>These ideas can help you understand your life</sup>

40 By understanding I mean <sup>not only</sup> more than a mere logical analysis, though that is included. I mean "understanding" in the sense in which it is used in the French proverb: "To understand all, is to forgive all." <sup>My meaning of "u" is like the meaning in</sup> Pedants sneer at an education which is useful. But if education is not useful, what is it? Is it a talent, to be hidden away in a napkin? <sup>people who pay too much attention to details or book knowledge</sup> Of course, education should be useful, whatever your aim in life. It was useful to Saint Augustine, and it was useful to Napoleon. <sup>It is useful, because understanding is</sup>

45 useful. <sup>It is useful to everyone</sup> I pass lightly over that understanding which should be given by the literary side of education. Nor do I wish to be supposed to <sup>I'll not talk too much about it either, talk about</sup> pronounce on the relative merits of a classical or a modern curriculum. I would only remark that the understanding which we want is an understanding of an insistent present. <sup>urgent demands notice</sup> The only use of a knowledge of the past is to <sup>supply, prepare</sup> equip us for the present. No more <sup>fatal</sup> deadly harm can be done to young minds than by <sup>don't pay enough attention to the present</sup> depreciation of the present. The present contains <sup>everything</sup> all that there is. It is holy ground; for it is the past, and it is the future. At the same time it must be observed that an age is no less past if it existed two hundred years ago than if it existed two thousand years ago. Do not be deceived by the pedantry of dates. The ages of Shakespeare and of Moliere are no less past than are the ages of Sophocles and of Virgil. <sup>sharing, exchange of deep thoughts, ideas & feelings</sup> The communion of saints is a great and inspiring assemblage, but it has only one possible hall of meeting, and that is, the present; and the mere lapse of time through which any particular group of saints must travel to reach that meeting-place, makes very little difference. <sup>room for them to meet</sup>

50 <sup>importance of the present</sup> I pass lightly over that understanding which should be given by the literary side of education. Nor do I wish to be supposed to <sup>I'll not talk too much about it either, talk about</sup> pronounce on the relative merits of a classical or a modern curriculum. I would only remark that the understanding which we want is an understanding of an insistent present. <sup>urgent demands notice</sup> The only use of a knowledge of the past is to <sup>supply, prepare</sup> equip us for the present. No more <sup>fatal</sup> deadly harm can be done to young minds than by <sup>don't pay enough attention to the present</sup> depreciation of the present. The present contains <sup>everything</sup> all that there is. It is holy ground; for it is the past, and it is the future. At the same time it must be observed that an age is no less past if it existed two hundred years ago than if it existed two thousand years ago. Do not be deceived by the pedantry of dates. The ages of Shakespeare and of Moliere are no less past than are the ages of Sophocles and of Virgil. <sup>sharing, exchange of deep thoughts, ideas & feelings</sup> The communion of saints is a great and inspiring assemblage, but it has only one possible hall of meeting, and that is, the present; and the mere lapse of time through which any particular group of saints must travel to reach that meeting-place, makes very little difference. <sup>room for them to meet</sup>

55 <sup>too many</sup> The communion of saints is a great and inspiring assemblage, but it has only one possible hall of meeting, and that is, the present; and the mere lapse of time through which any particular group of saints must travel to reach that meeting-place, makes very little difference. <sup>meeting place</sup>

60 <sup>utilising</sup> Passing now to the scientific and logical side of education, we remember that here also ideas which are not utilised are <sup>indeed, really</sup> positively harmful. By utilising an idea, I mean relating it to that stream <sup>combine, put idea into (life)</sup> compounded of sense perceptions, feelings, hopes, desires, and of mental activities adjusting thought to thought, which forms our life. I can <sup>you are always thinking, make yourself suitable for dif. situations</sup> To change so as to match or fit.



65 imagine <sup>group of people</sup> a set of beings which might <sup>strengthen, improve themselves</sup> fortify their souls by passively <sup>study</sup> reviewing <sup>receive</sup> disconnected ideas. Humanity is not built that way — except perhaps some editors of newspapers. <sup>diff. ideas of newspaper should be suitable for various groups of people.</sup>

<sup>△ prove</sup> 68 In scientific training, the first thing to do with an idea is to prove it. But allow me for one moment to extend the meaning of 'prove'. I mean — to prove its worth. <sup>value or usefulness</sup> Now an idea is not worth much unless the <sup>improved statement in which an opinion or judgement is expressed</sup> propositions in which it is embodied are true. <sup>an idea is embodied in the proposition</sup>

70 Accordingly an essential part of the proof of an idea is the proof, <sup>idea</sup> either by experiment or by logic, of the truth of the propositions. But it is not essential that this proof of the truth should constitute the <sup>to be points of attitude / compel</sup> first introduction to the idea. After all, its <sup>faceful statement or claim</sup> assertion by the authority of respectable teachers is sufficient evidence to begin with. In our first <sup>so declared or stated positively</sup> contact with a set of propositions, we commence by appreciating their importance. <sup>begin, what we should prove is whether it is useful or important</sup>

<sup>process of 75 appreciation</sup> That is what we all do in after-life. We do not attempt, in the strict sense, to prove or to disprove anything, unless its importance makes it worthy of that <sup>proof</sup> honour. These <sup>① people prove it, ② we appreciate it</sup> two processes of proof in the narrow sense, and of <sup>② of the imp & worth too strict</sup> appreciation, do not require a rigid separation in time. Both can be proceeded with nearly <sup>at the same time</sup> concurrently. But in so far as <sup>thing that is more important than others</sup> either process must have the priority, it should be that of appreciation by use.

80 Furthermore, <sup>try</sup> we should not endeavour to use propositions in isolation. <sup>I want to stress</sup> Emphatically I do not mean, a neat little set of experiments to illustrate Proposition I and then the proof of Proposition I, a neat little set of experiments to illustrate Proposition II and then the proof of Proposition II, and so on to the end of the book. <sup>This is the most boring</sup> Nothing could be more boring. <sup>connected ideas</sup> Interrelated truths are utilised <sup>as a whole, all together</sup> en bloc, and the

85 various propositions are employed in any <sup>used</sup> order, and with any <sup>way</sup> reiteration. Choose <sup>can be used again & again, don't separate them</sup> some important applications of your theoretical subject; and study them concurrently with the systematic theoretical exposition. <sup>explaining & making clear</sup> Keep the theoretical exposition short and

<sup>put theory into practice, study them, then put it into another theory (write sth about practice)</sup> simple, but let it be strict and rigid so far as it goes. It should not be too long for it to be easily known with thoroughness and accuracy. <sup>an amount much greater than it needed</sup> The consequences of a <sup>repetition</sup> plethora of <sup>very bad</sup> half-digested theoretical knowledge are deplorable. Also the theory should not be <sup>confused</sup> muddled up with the practice. The child should have no doubt when it is proving and when it is utilising. My point is that what is proved should be utilised, and that what is <sup>theory</sup> utilised should — so far as is practicable — be proved. I am far from <sup>claiming</sup> asserting that proof and utilisation are the same thing. <sup>I don't think they are the same thing</sup>

From: L. G. Kirszner and S. R. Mandell, pp.287-289.